











ARE YOU REA



PHOTOGRAPHIST

Robert F. Heinecken

Interviewed by Stephen K. Lehmer

VOLUME II

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## CONTENTS

### VOLUME II

TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (April 14, 1996).....287

Heinecken serves on thesis committees outside of the photography program--Teaches in UCLA's Department of Film and Television--Preference for nonlinear, experimental film--Heinecken's photographic sequences and films--A photograph's transition from an actively manipulated work to a carefully handled, valuable piece of art--Nathan Lyons's contribution to the development of photography as collectible art--Exhibitions organized by Peter Bunnell--The development of Heinecken's career as a collected photographer.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (April 14, 1996).....311

The need for museums to adjust their manner of exhibition to suit photographs--How Heinecken balances his project schedule to avoid downtime--The continuities in Heinecken's work--Right-wing censorship of the arts--The importance of the dealer to an artist--The genesis of the Society for Photographic Education (SPE)--Interest groups within the SPE--New technology as an issue within the SPE--The inclusion of students in the SPE--The SPE's membership and goals.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (April 27, 1996).....336

Museums in the U.S. that were collecting and exhibiting photographs in the 1960s--UCLA's Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts begins collecting photographs--The Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies--Photography galleries in Southern California in the sixties and early seventies--The photography program at California Institute of the Arts--John Baldessari's relationship to photography--Heinecken's preference for the term "photographist" rather than "photographer."

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (April 27, 1996).....363

Contemporary photographers who have redefined



photography--Photography as a language--The unique culture of Los Angeles and the artists it has produced--New York art galleries' expansion into the Los Angeles art market--Los Angeles photography galleries--The Museum of Modern Art's *Mirrors and Windows* exhibition.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side One (May 11, 1996).....388

Minor White and his students--Seminal exhibitions of photography during the sixties--The development of photography in Europe--The Museum of Modern Art's *Photography into Sculpture* exhibition in 1970--Reasons Heinecken moved beyond the boundaries of conventional photography--Heinecken's *Are You Rea* portfolio and its sources of inspiration--Other portfolios by Heinecken--Heinecken's search for a "visual gestalt" in the *Are You Rea* photographs.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side Two (May 11, 1996).....413

How Heinecken determines the sequences for his portfolios--The influence of Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades" on Heinecken's work--Heinecken's use of images from advertisements and consumer culture--His desire to maintain a consistent style but to avoid repeating himself--Documentary photography--Heinecken uses a special Polaroid camera to make photograms of food for his pieces *Iconographic Art Lunches*--Working with technicians in Polaroid's labs to photograph television tapes--How Polaroid's forty-inch-by-eighty-inch camera came to be created.

TAPE NUMBER: X, Side One (May 25, 1996).....439

The exhibition *Three Photographers Look at the Nude: E.J. Bellocq, Robert Heinecken, and Les Krims*--Heinecken's work during the upheaval of his life in 1975--His view that photography is not inherently an expressive medium--Bellocq's photographs of New Orleans prostitutes--The problem of elitism and the overly cerebral in approaching contemporary art--Debate over James Hugunin's *Spot* magazine article comparing Heinecken's work to Allan Sekula's--Sexual imagery in Heinecken's work.



TAPE NUMBER: X, Side Two (May 25, 1996).....462

The subjective nature of the categories "sexual," "sensual," "erotic," "pornographic," and "obscene"--Cultural mores and pornography--Heinecken's continuing interest in sexually based material--Heinecken's "guerrilla" piece using a *Time* magazine image of a Vietnamese soldier--The drive to create art--Heinecken's appreciation of writing as an art form--The special ability and role of the artist--Heinecken's increasing lack of involvement in the Los Angeles art community and in current theoretical debates--Serves on the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)'s artists advisory board.

TAPE NUMBER: XI, Side One (May 26, 1996).....486

More on MOCA's artists advisory board--MOCA's beginnings--The collection of Heinecken's work at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona--Collective book project with Robert Frank, John Wood, and David Heath--Reasons the project was never fully realized--The importance of continuing to exhibit one's art when teaching at a university--Serving as an example for students.

TAPE NUMBER: XI, Side Two (May 26, 1996).....512

Heinecken's satirical lectures for the SPE--The perceived need for photographs always to be captioned--Heinecken's interest in twisting perceptions of reality--The theatricality of Heinecken's lectures--Preparing to move from Los Angeles to Chicago--Heinecken's interest in card games--The origins of the Heinecken family name.

Index.....532





TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

APRIL 14, 1996

LEHMER: Today, Robert, I wanted to tie up some loose ends with the faculty position section of your oral history and a couple of questions on the graduate program. Then we'll try to move into the Society for Photographic Education [SPE] and see where we'll go from there.

We were just visiting off tape about you being chair of forty-five thesis committees. That's a number that you said--

HEINECKEN: Not chair but on.

LEHMER: Oh. You weren't chair, but you were on forty-five thesis committees.

HEINECKEN: I would have been chair of those that were in photography. But the ones that were in painting or in sculpture, whatever, I wouldn't have been the chair. That would have been someone in that field. Then the ones outside of the Department [of Art]-- I would also have been just a member of the graduate degree committee in these other departments of the College [of Fine Arts] or in some cases for those outside of the college.

LEHMER: You mentioned that you were on committees for dance. Obviously, within the department I'm sure you're on numerous committees for printmaking, sculpture, drawing



and painting.

HEINECKEN: Although I think most of those would have been in new forms or sculpture as opposed to painting and drawing, although I was on those committees sometimes. But it wouldn't have been something that I would have been that interested in as opposed to fields that were outside of conventional drawing and painting situations.

While I'm thinking of it, I mentioned the ones in dance because I was interested in that. I also did some in film but not in theater or the things where I didn't feel I had any real interest or could be useful to me.

Then I know I did at least two Ph.D.'s in the history department. In one case-- I think his name was Jonathan Spaulding was doing a kind of relook at Ansel Adams's relationship to the Sierra Club and the whole political aspect that this guy was trying to uncover within Adams's otherwise perfect-looking career or whatever. The other one in the history department wasn't specifically about photography, but the guy was doing kind of a social history of the thirties or something in California. Again, it had to do with Adams's relationship to other--

LEHMER: WPA [Works Progress Administration]?

HEINECKEN: Well, I think one of the things that he was looking at was the Manzanar [Relocation Center] thing and how Adams sort of got involved in making those photographs



of the relocation camps, you know, that kind of a history.

LEHMER: When we think of the Sierra Club and its concern for the environment and the role that Ansel Adams played in promoting the Sierra Club, what did his thesis explore? What kind of highlights can you think of?

HEINECKEN: Well, that's a little bit difficult. To be absolutely correct, I'm not sure I could do it. But the point that this Spaulding guy was exploring was really not a biographical look at Adams but was looking at how do politics, philosophical ideas, and social and cultural ideas fit into Adams's activities as opposed to this being an artist thing. He always simply promoted himself as an artist, yet he was very active in all of these other things on political levels--you know, corresponding and whatever with government people and stuff. So that's what this guy's thesis was about. And like a good thesis, it kind of debunked the popular view of what Adams was and what a wonderful man he was and all of that. It simply showed a real man with a lot of different interests and with as many dirty deals as most of us go through and stuff like that. [laughs] It was--just as a sideline--a very good thesis, and I did read the whole thing. Not always would you be able to read all that stuff and stay engaged in it, but that was a very good topic that he did. He's now teaching somewhere, I think.



LEHMER: Okay. Did you ever get out of the humanities on your committees?

HEINECKEN: I don't think so, no.

LEHMER: Okay. There's one area that we've kind of missed that I thought was unique, and I just found it out accidentally. During your tenure as a faculty member in the art department you had a one-year teaching assignment in the film department [Department of Film and Television], if I understand that correctly.

HEINECKEN: I'm not sure if it was a year or a semester or whatever, but yeah.

LEHMER: I thought it was kind of interesting, because you always had an interest in film, and you always--to try to get this on tape--were interested in independent film. You were always looking at what was coming out of the film school. Your interest, I guess, developed your unofficial expertise or offered another opinion as to one's work or the program's work, the diversity of the students.

HEINECKEN: Well, we had one person in particular I remember--Heidi Katz--who did her work in film. I mean, she did her M.A. or her M.F.A. or whatever it was project in film. There were a couple of others like that too, I think.

LEHMER: Was William Doherty in film recently?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. He actually took his degree through the





film school, because that's where he was enrolled, but he did photographs as the main-- Well, not the main part, but at least half of it.

LEHMER: Describe how you came about teaching for that however long stint in the film department.

HEINECKEN: It seems to me like I've mentioned that, but I could--

LEHMER: I don't think it was on tape.

HEINECKEN: Oh. Well, we'd have to look and see what year it was, but the gist of it was a guy named Colin Young was the chairman of the film department. He was an English guy. I think he had come from the Royal College of Art or something, one of those places. He was a hotshot guy, and he was really terrific. But anyway, we were at a cocktail party, and I'm talking to him, and he said, "I saw you at the screening the other evening"-- It's even worse for the film faculty than anyone else. You have to look at all those films--right?--to make decisions about graduate students. It's just endless, endless time, and half the time you fall asleep. You know, they're dumb films. With paintings you can just walk out of the room, but with film you've got to sit. Anyway, he said, "Well, what did you think about it?" I said, "Well, frankly, I've been going to these things for six years or something like that, and it keeps getting worse and worse. In this last film



showing, I just couldn't see anything in it which was that interesting to me." He said--we're drinking--"Well, do you think you could do a better job of it?" I said, "Certainly." [laughs] So he said, "Okay. I'll talk to the art faculty and the film faculty, and we'll get you to come over to teach." Of course, at that point I'm thinking, "Wow. What am I going to do with that?" But, I mean, I had my foot in it by that time. [laughs]

So I think there was definitely a full semester where I didn't teach in the art department at all. Then I think the second semester I did a course or two in film and a course or two in the art department.

But film at that point--still, kind of--only interests me to the degree that it involves a kind of montage or collage or a disparity of time and space and all of the things that are the non-narrative kind of filmmaking, which of course is what UCLA was very good at in the sixties. By this time it's the seventies, when it had disintegrated and began to be more focused on narrative films and commercial films and technical-- You know, all of that. They lost their-- They were one of the best independent filmmaking schools in the country, maybe the best. And at that time USC [University of Southern California] was the bad school. Now UCLA is the bad school, I think, and USC-- I don't know what they do. But



anyway, they went with the culture just like everything else. USC, for instance, began to get huge sums of money from people like [Steven] Spielberg and whoever. You can't take that kind of money from those kinds of people and make independent films with that money. That wouldn't go. I mean, if I'm giving money, I want it to reflect my taste. So that's how that happened.

LEHMER: So is there anything that you can remember--?

HEINECKEN: There's another part of this story, which I might have told you. In 1966 I went to Europe on my sabbatical leave. One of the things that I was there to do was to take a whole bunch of student films from UCLA, some of which I had worked on with students, some I hadn't. But I had a package put together that I was taking to this film showing in Basel, Switzerland, to represent the UCLA film department in that festival, at which schools from all over the world show films. On the way to there I was in Madrid when I had everything stolen out of my car. I might have mentioned that. They just took everything out of the car. We went in to have a quick lunch with the kids, and we came out, and the car was empty, including all of these films.

LEHMER: I had heard that story, which I thought was interesting, which was some handicapped veteran said he'd watch your car for you and you--



HEINECKEN: For twenty-five cents or something.

LEHMER: You said, "No, no, no."

HEINECKEN: "No, thank you." [laughs] So that's the idiot tourist kind of thing. But I did go to the festival, and I explained what had happened and made a presentation of what UCLA's film school was like and so on, but no films. [laughs] So they were a little bit upset that that happened--I mean UCLA was.

LEHMER: Understandably. When you taught--

HEINECKEN: This guy, Colin Young, by the way, left very shortly after that, because in my conversations with him he could see that it wasn't even going to be interesting to him to be involved in the direction that the film department was going. He wasn't interested to try to change that direction. So I think he went back to England or to someplace in Europe to teach.

LEHMER: Sometimes it takes a very perceptive person to be able to know what nut you can crack and--

HEINECKEN: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I think he-- It doesn't matter. I think there are a lot of British people who have these kinds of expertise. They want to come to the United States to try it out. But he never would have been happy living in America. He was one of those kinds of people.

LEHMER: Robert, you had some--maybe you were under the





influence at the time--specific ideas probably as to what was missing for you in the films. Can you think back on that era and what you were interested in trying to accomplish when you were teaching? Your time is valuable to you. You must have had some ideas as to what you wanted to accomplish.

HEINECKEN: I think I had, prior to this incident, begun to make short experimental films myself--16-millimeter stuff--from collage material and sort of random, very corny Bruce Conner kinds of ideas or something like that. But I had made maybe three, five short three- or four- or five- minute films, so I'm sure that that had already begun before this incident came up about going over there to teach. So I had some idea that there would be a more-- Not necessarily more expressive but more visually chaotic than what I perceived to be the way that their teaching was beginning to go. I mean, there was more and more emphasis being put on the writing skills of the graduate students and whether they could actually construct a reasonable kind of narrative.

LEHMER: More linear.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, exactly. And not just more chaos was needed--although I think that's true--but to try to develop experimental experiences in film as opposed to following eventually a kind of Hollywood convention.



LEHMER: Can you elaborate on that? I'm not sure I'm--

HEINECKEN: Well, it's actually interesting in this sense, too, that now you have films like *Pulp Fiction* or other kinds of films where nonlinear events are incorporated. That is to say, things don't necessarily happen in the sequence that we experience them in or something like that. Films now are even interestingly affected by MTV [Music Television] kinds of cutting and editing and superimposition. You know, they're using those things, but they're still basically tied to something that can be understood as a language idea being put into visual terms as opposed to a visual film like Conner's films. Is that clear? I mean, it's hard to express without giving an example.

LEHMER: A couple of times you've mentioned Bruce Conner. I'm not asking you to define it thoroughly, but what are you thinking of when you mention Bruce Conner? I mean, what would you consider unique? Could you encapsulate an essence of Bruce Conner? What makes his work different?

HEINECKEN: Well, he made a number of films, but I'm remembering one in particular--I can't remember the name of it, but it's famous--where he took a bunch of footage from early cartoons, Mickey Mouse, basically, or the early development of those characters, and simply put it into another whole scene which became absolutely sexual and



dirty, using materials that were supposed to be most entertaining for children.

LEHMER: Clean.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. And he cut the visual material together in such a way it was a very fast-paced thing. You know, you were only seeing a fraction of the activity of Mickey Mouse doing a particular thing. But it would be cut together in such a way that it became this whole kind of mad sexual event. For me, at least, it was.

LEHMER: A comedian came to mind when you said this, George Carlin, who is so good at taking words and analyzing their character--

HEINECKEN: Or Lenny Bruce, who was functioning at that time, also.

LEHMER: There you go. All right.

HEINECKEN: I saw once in San Francisco--at the [Purple] Onion I think it was called--Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, and a guy called the "Mad Professor" or something like that. No, that wasn't it. Anyway, there were four comics in one night at this place who within the next five years or whatever were the hot-- I mean, Lenny Bruce was dead probably by that time. But to see all those guys in one evening was just an amazing thing, which would never happen now. You might see one of them someplace.

There are other filmmakers that are certainly as



interesting as Bruce Conner, but I can't quite think of them right now. Jonas Mekas and--

LEHMER: What was that again?

HEINECKEN: Jonas Mekas of the Mekas brothers was another important-- Maybe I'll think of some names as we go along.

LEHMER: Okay. I'm trying to think here of any kind of specifics that you might have--

HEINECKEN: Well, I think one thing that comes to my mind-- What I was trying to get at is some kind of--especially with the students--unconscious way of putting a film together which has to be constructed almost like no other thing. Maybe music in some sense. But it doesn't exist like a picture. It's an event in time. You're pretty much locked into watching it over a period of time. It's dark, and there's no environment for it, not like a gallery. It's a very interesting thing. If you're going to make three or five minutes, not worrying about two and a half hours of this and all that money that has to go into it-- I mean, these things worked on shoestring [budget]s. They were mostly just taking other material and reshuffling it in time so that it's not linear but still is seen linearly.

LEHMER: Or at least exposing the fact that no matter what we experience there's a lot of depth and complexity to things.





HEINECKEN: During this time period I probably have ten pictures that are made directly out of the idea of linear time, so that there would be maybe six or seven units in a piece that would-- One comes to mind. It's called *Different Strokes*--which was stolen, actually. There are four or six big panels. The whole picture is like twenty feet long or something like that. Well, not that big, but-- So the first panel would be, let's say, made from a superimposition of A and B. The next one, which would be adjacent to it, would be B and C, and C and D, and so on, so that if you look at the structure of the picture it's really narrative from left to right. There are all these elements in the adjacent panels that carry across those panels, because you're using the same-- One of those is an image that's already been seen, and they're a negative rather than positive. They're pornographic pictures. In film they'd have a word for this. This is a film idea, to take a sequence of pictures and overlap them, or cut them I guess would be the film way, in order to make a linear time out of it. There were other, I would say, eight or ten pictures made under some premise that's related to the linear development of images left to right as opposed to from zero to two minutes or something like that. But it's definitely a picture that leans on a film premise in that way.



Another film I made, I think either with students or not, we took the camera and we built a mask for the lens that would show you only the top third of the image, the middle third, and then the bottom third. So by putting this mask on and then sort of arbitrarily exposing from various magazine materials that are just scraps, you have three films going at once; one in the top third of the thing, one in the middle third, and one at the bottom third. And they are linear. I mean, they are sequential images, but you're watching three of them at once--not superimposed but just separate time things going on in different rhythms and different speeds that would keep changing. It was like a five-minute thing. It was one of the things that got lost in Europe, actually. It was a great film. I did it with the students, actually, or I wouldn't have shown it there.

LEHMER: So you never duplicated the films or anything like that?

HEINECKEN: No. That was the attitude of the time, too, that these were the original things. It wasn't like you were going to go sell this stuff or whatever. It was like the original positive image that-- I probably would have made a negative eventually if it had survived. I think people were much more loose about things like that. I mean, so there's just one film. That's all you need,



really, if you're going to show it, right? You're not going to distribute it. Nobody is going to buy it. Actually--I think of this every time I bring it up--there may have been a copy made that is sitting over there somewhere in that archive. They do keep copies, or they used to keep copies, of the students' work.

LEHMER: It's interesting. Another thought comes to mind when you mention this. As somebody who's creating the work, the objectives of creating the work as the artist, the originator, things seem different to you than they would to someone who is viewing the artwork. I can remember working with you on projects where we would be putting things together, or maybe I was printing for you. But it may have been nothing more than for me to take something you had worked on to the gallery. You and I are hauling it down elevators and into the truck, and I'm hauling it off. Then, when I hand it to the gallery, they pick it up with white gloves. All of a sudden I had this sense of transition from an ongoing work that is always changing to when at some point you have made a decision that it's terminated. You've let go of it. But then someone else picks it up, and it has become valuable, because they can't touch it and they can't change it, because they don't have your skills. I mean, you are who you are. You are unique. I found that interesting, how I



was the intermediary between the artist, who is concerned about making the work, the artist who doesn't think about making a duplicate print of a film, and the museum person who looks at this as a very valuable artifact. It's an interesting idea.

HEINECKEN: Well, let me interrupt you. Two things come to mind here. One is that during this whole time period you go from-- And it's a kind of insipid way it happens. I don't know how to put this, but the white gloves reminded me of it. It's the whole thing about archival printing and processing and what UV [ultraviolet] light does to photographs. I started to say it's insane how it got so precious in a way. But that was one of the things in my career that changed completely, from where you would just throw pictures around on a table, even a valuable picture, until the museum started to get into it and curators began to develop in photography. Most of those people came from situations which were painting- or printmaking-oriented training where you do handle things carefully like that. But it still seems ironic to me that in a medium where it's the simplest thing to produce another one or a similar one that they're still having archival prints-- What's the word? I want to say original prints as opposed to later prints. Vintage prints is the term. So all of that is part of what happened to museum





life or the collector's life or the gallery's life in relation to the development of this medium during this very short time period. Well, the white gloves is an interesting symbol for that.

The other thing is that for whatever reasons, which you probably will begin to understand about me, I do have a very organized side. Whether I thought I would ever make another one or not, I would put that negative somewhere. I know maybe not how to get at it, but I thought I knew how to get at it at the point I was doing it. I did a lot of edition work. By edition I mean they're not all the same but they're all the same idea. Some of them are actually an edition where there are absolute duplicates or copies made.

LEHMER: Robert, I feel that you have shown great discipline. I've observed you for years where you are a working artist producing work not thinking much, in one sense, maybe, about it after it's left your hands, yet in a sense you do. You keep moving forward to the next project-- There's an idea that I'm trying to create in my head here. Okay. Let me see if I can reformulate this now. In relationship to what we've just been talking about, you are also an artist who in a very short period of time went from a graduate student to a new instructor to someone who was recognized as a serious and important



artist. You were a key figure to Nathan Lyons. You were in a group show at the Museum of Modern Art shortly out of graduate school, within two or three years or something like that, I think. My thoughts are that you have disciplined yourself on one hand to not take it too seriously and on the other hand to keep it in check, to not let it go to your head but to value that. The work that you create is of value.

There are lots of questions that come into my head at this moment, but one would be, how do you balance the making of work, the manipulation of work, the refinement of the work, from a concept to a product that you finally let go of? You are having to think about the fact that your work is beginning to be collected, the work that you create is of value. How did you deal with the fact that whatever you produced would be collectable?

HEINECKEN: Well, part of this obviously has to do with the overall rather rapidly accelerating interest in photography as "art," right? Once you have that, you do have the exhibitions, you do have the collecting by museums--in that order, I guess--finally collecting by people not connected to museums but private collectors, which necessitates a gallery. These are all part of a system by which these things become seen or available beyond the artist's studio. So it's something that's



happening during this time period.

You mentioned Nathan Lyons, who, I guess more than anyone else, was responsible not only for my inclusion in certain things that he was involved in but a lot of other people that he was-- He never really was championing an individual. It was always like how a certain individual fit into what he perceived to be something which was happening or was going to happen and was going to solidify into something, all of which happened. Nathan was much more forward-thinking and forward-looking than almost anybody else. He did five or seven books in maybe as many years, which actually began to set up-- One of his exhibitions he titled [*Toward*] a *Social Landscape*, which became the term, right? But he invented it. I'm sure there are other things like that, but I'm just-- The first show for me that was very important was *The Persistence of Vision*, which he put together. There were five people, all of whom were doing what he called manipulated work. So suddenly I have this exhibition with a book that goes with it traveling all over the country. The same with [*Toward a*] *Social Landscape*. He really did define some kind of groupings so that one could begin to understand that the photograph is not just one thing but can be manipulated into one way, or it can have political meaning in another, and so on. He really laid that out. Other



people knew these things or sensed them and maybe were teaching them or utilizing them, but no one put the exhibitions together and got them out on the road and got the publications made like he did.

LEHMER: Now, we should mention that Nathan Lyons was at that time curator of the George Eastman House [International Museum of Photography and Film]. This was in the mid-sixties.

HEINECKEN: Which he left shortly thereafter and constructed what is now called the Visual Studies Workshop, which continued to be one of the main forces for distribution of exhibitions and catalogs and things like that, and finally a graduate program.

LEHMER: Can you remember who the five people were in *The Persistence*?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. [Jerry] Uelsmann, myself, Ray Metzker, John Wood, and a combination of Charlie [Charles] Gill the painter and Don [Donald] Blumberg, who was a photographer. They collaborated on some things. Blumberg made these large, I think we would call them, sort of documentary photographs, and then Charlie Gill would paint on them and alter them completely. But those were the five sets of pictures, one of them being two people.

The same with-- It wasn't so much [John] Szarkowski but Peter Bunnell. He was working at the Museum of Modern





Art in New York, first I think as an intern and then as an assistant curator or some adjunct position to Szarkowski. Peter put together two shows. The first was *Photography as Printmaking*, which meant that he differentiated the kind of photograph that was related to the tradition of printmaking in terms of scale, in terms of social-political ideas, in terms of manipulation, in terms of things even like editioning and proper printmaking techniques--not techniques, but whatever. That was a very important show.

Then he did another one called *Photography for Collectors*, which I think utilized photographs that were in collections by private individuals, if I'm remembering correctly.

Then finally he did the most important one, which was called *Photography into Sculpture*, which was all three-dimensional stuff. It opened at the Museum of Modern Art and then traveled all over the country for two years. That was interesting, because I had a number of pieces in that. Also, a lot of students from UCLA, either who were students at the time or had recently been students, were involved in this exhibition right out of school.

The point here really-- I'm trying to respond to your premise about an accelerated career, which is correct. Well, most of it didn't happen because of anything that I



did, necessarily. I mean, I'm making the work, but the climate for the expansion of understanding photography in an art context was an immense thing. People like Nathan Lyons and Szarkowski--not so much Szarkowski, because he had his own thing pinned down already-- But people like Bunnell. If you looked at my résumé during that time period you'd see dozens of exhibitions.

LEHMER: Taking that into effect, can you think back on what a few people experienced? That is, they go not only from making the work on a personal level to maybe-- And you have said this to me. You have to be obsessive. You know, there's a drive to make the work. It's not a matter that you make the work to become successful. You make the work because you have to make the work.

HEINECKEN: But this thing about the career always comes up. I don't want to be so idealistic in a sense to say that as an individual I wasn't interested in a career, because I was. But you can't have a career without having the pictures. Although you can if you're smart enough, and there are those kinds of things out there. So I don't know. Is that clear?

LEHMER: That's a start. What I'm beginning to see us trying to accomplish is there's a hierarchy or a sequence of events where you learn, you train, you practice the production of your own artwork. There's a response to



that work. Now, this is where I think only a few people--you being one of them--meet with a strong enough response that your work is collectible to a larger number of people. You continue to make the work; that's probably what I'm talking about with the discipline. I know of cases where there have been people whom I felt met with too much success too soon and weren't able to continue and weren't able to follow up, were intimidated by that success. I'm thinking of a couple of people--I hesitate to use specific names--whom I felt made incredibly important work, explosive work, that may to this day be their best work, that was their first work, and they weren't able to sustain that success and recognition. So my question to you is, how did you maintain a separation between your personal work and your career? Knowing that they obviously are related, this is a tricky question, and I'm still struggling to formulate this idea. But you are one of the few people whose work becomes of value to others.

HEINECKEN: Well, I don't know if this is the way to start it, but then and now there's nobody making anything--more then than now, I suppose--that would resemble what I did. I don't know. I think that's good in a sense. I don't think there's anybody else quite with my temperament. I mean, I see things around that might kind of use



structural ideas that I developed or developed with other people, certainly, but that doesn't have the subject connection. Or I'll see subject matter that I would use, but it doesn't have the structure or it doesn't have the-- Oh, I don't know. Does that make sense at all?





TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE TWO

APRIL 14, 1996

LEHMER: All right. So let me rephrase that. There was an interesting statement made by an artist about the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, that they always have photography exhibited in the hallways of the museum outside of the main galleries. They would shove it into the hallways with the idea that it was exhibited but not given the prominence of a main gallery that you might give to a large group of paintings. The mistake was made in failing to recognize the fact that everybody had to go to the bathroom or go from one gallery to another down that hallway. No matter what gallery people went to see, they would almost always see the photography, because it was in the hallway.

HEINECKEN: Well, that's a very interesting fact, and funny in a way, ironic. But I was just thinking in that museum, which of course was not built as a museum but was made into one, the scale of the galleries still just eats photographs up. It's a bunch of little postage stamps laying in a huge space, right? It's not until much more recently--like probably their new museum, which I haven't seen yet, actually--they would design some galleries for photography. They wouldn't have twenty-foot ceilings.



You would have intimate, broken-up spaces so that it's not as cavern-like as you need for their Clyfford Still paintings or whatever. So that's another development, really.

When you were saying San Francisco art museum--it wasn't called that then, and I can't think of the guy's name who was curator there for years--that was one of the institutions that had a collection of photography rather--

LEHMER: Was that [F.] Van Deren Coke?

HEINECKEN: No, before him. Van Deren Coke really made it into a very prestigious, full collection of photographs. He bought a lot of stuff. But he had a kind of importance because of his own career in writing and whatever that he was an equal to any other curator. I want to say-- I'll think of it later. But, I mean, this first curator [John Humphrey] was like a minor figure there. He'd been there a long time. He was in charge of photographs and prints, maybe, but he just didn't have any clout. That museum was, is still, one of the few where you could go and see photographs. The other was the Art Institute of Chicago, which very early on had a collection of photographs given by Julien Levy, I think was his name, who collected all the surrealist photographs. So they can always have those to look at there. And to some extent the Museum of Modern Art, also. But those three certainly were the only ones



that had any kind of viable program.

LEHMER: I think something I feel we still haven't-- Let me give it one more shot here. You make work, and then you find out that it is valuable. You begin to see someone receive your work with white gloves, so to speak. How did you keep that knowledge of fame in check? I sense--and tell me if I'm right or not--that you have done a good job, as much as can be expected, of not being influenced by the fame. In other words, as Edward Weston said, the one thing he was most afraid of was imitating himself. I'm thinking of my friend the painter up in Montana, the Native American, who says that it's hard for him to do new work because of the demands by the galleries to keep making what was previously successful. I feel that you have a healthy balance between recognizing and taking yourself seriously, and yet you seem to have the ability and the freedom, through discipline, of creating new work. What I'm getting at is there's a conflict between making work on a more ideal or pure level and satisfying a market. I sense a potential conflict between your personal art making and your career. Can you expand on that? How did you deal with it? Do you agree?

HEINECKEN: Well, sure. I think everybody faces basically those kinds of dichotomies about how to construct a life and a body of material, whatever it might be, without



getting into some kind of rut. I have a conscious way of--I don't know if this answers the particular question--leapfrogging, where I'll be working on something maybe for a month or two or something, but before that's wrapped up--you know, finished as an idea--I'll start something else which hopefully will be related to the previous work but investigates either a new structure or a new subject or a new something, so that it's leapfrogging. Before, what I have run into occasionally, which made me adopt this system, is that when you work for a period of time--it could be long, it could be short--you finish it, and you know it's finished, but you don't have anything to do next, so you've got to stop and think. I don't do that effectively. I'm lazy like everybody else in some sense. This leapfrogging idea is one way of not having a kind of stasis period after finishing something, so that there's always something that's underway in the gestation period before the other thing is actually finalized. I usually try to induce that idea in some form into student's works so that they don't see it as a project that you finish and then you've got to find another project and stuff like that. It's a way of making it more seamless, a way of spending your time.

LEHMER: In a sense you've answered the question of how do you deal with the crash after a major exhibition has been





hung. My question-- I don't think we've answered quite yet what I'm struggling with. Another angle on this would be-- Let's say you hang a strong body of work. You feel damn good about it, and it's received well. What keeps you from continuing that? How do you feel because of the success? I mean, we're all social human beings. We like it when people appreciate what we attempt to do.

HEINECKEN: Well, I think it's temperamental in me. I'm as interested in the visibility of my work as anyone else would be. I do see and understand the possible consequences. You see it in other individuals, even your friends, whoever. This leapfrogging thing is not a device to prevent that, but temperamentally, by this time, I've figured out-- What's very interesting to me is that someone who knew past work that I've made could go into a new one-person exhibition someplace where they didn't even know what it would be and recognize that it was my work without having my name on it. Not because it's stylistically similar, because I don't do that. I'll actually make some very clean breaks in stopping something then starting doing something else. But the spirit of why one would do this is the same.

It's like [Marcel] Duchamp. Duchamp only made maybe fifty, sixty things, but each one was different. The clue to knowing it's him is that no one would do that. No one



else would have the mind to do that or the silliness to do it or the temperament to do it. So he invents what is called a "ready-made," which is probably equal in importance in the history of art to Cézanne. He only made a few things, but each one was unique, yet you would say, "That's got to be a Duchamp." It's that crazy, or it's that ready-made based, or it's something like that. If I had a hero it would be him, as opposed to anybody else. Does that--?

LEHMER: Yeah.

HEINECKEN: I don't do it much anymore because it's too much work, but during this time period, if I finished a new body of material that hadn't been shown or seen, I'd make slides of it. Then I would send those sets of slides out to the five or six people that I thought-- Like Nathan or Szarkowski or whoever. That's just a toss-away. It's just like, "Here's what I'm doing." They appreciate that, because they don't know who's out in California or who's here. So that's definitely a career thing. It's keeping people informed of what you're doing, because they're not going to come looking for you.

LEHMER: Exactly.

HEINECKEN: They might see it when it comes to their city if it does, but if it doesn't--

LEHMER: Okay, this brings me to another point. I don't



want this--

HEINECKEN: This is not, by the way, to induce a sale. It is to keep the five or seven people--curators--who have shown past interest in the work informed of what I'm doing, so that if someone says, "I want to do a show about this or that," then someone will say, "Oh, I remember Heinecken had something like that." You know, that kind of stuff.

LEHMER: Yeah.

HEINECKEN: So it's not a pushy way. It's like writers, poets, whatever, they're always exchanging stuff once it's done. You know, they want their peers to know what they're doing. They're not sleeping somewhere. There's another point there. Well, I lost it.

But one thing that I was going to say, too, is that I've had some bad reviews. I've had pictures defaced. I've had pictures stolen. I've had pictures spit on in one case. All kinds of things like that have happened because of the subject matter or what's perceived to be subject matter that's not appropriate for this or that reason. That doesn't happen all the time, but when that happens it can be discouraging. It tells you you're-- You don't want to be offensive, or I don't want to be offensive. I want to do what I want to do. But if I've taken something and put it in the wrong place, that's my



fault or the curator's fault. If it's going to offend a certain group of people, then-- It's not the bad publicity of that, it's just that's not what art is supposed to do, as far as I'm concerned. You want to tweak people. You want to make them see something in a new light, but you don't-- You know, the censorship thing is a big issue. It's going to get worse and worse and worse.

LEHMER: Why?

HEINECKEN: Well, I think that the right wing is an important political force. You know, someone like Jesse Helms is a fool, but he gets things done, and he causes a lot of trouble. You know, coming down on Jock Sturges and what's her name, Sally Mann, and numerous others, I mean, that stops your life for whatever period of time. When they come in and take stuff out of your studio without a warrant necessarily--and it's legal to do that--I say that's bad. And I don't see anybody countering that politically. I mean, other people are neutral on it or something. But even liberal thinking, it seems to me, has come to a point where, "Well, we have obscenity laws. We have certain restrictions that are politically based on what can be seen." Not what can be made, but what can be seen. The [Robert] Mapplethorpe thing was nuts, you know? It's like Germany was before in the thirties. You smell things like these beginning to happen. The rounding up of





all those so-called abstract paintings and making that exhibition which was to show the people "bad art."

LEHMER: "Degenerate."

HEINECKEN: Yeah, "degenerate art."

LEHMER: Well, I'm interested here in something you said that I have never really thought about. It's not only that you have an idea and that you articulate that idea, but now you also have alluded to the idea that you have to continue that responsibility to where and how you present the work. You want to tweak, but you don't want--

HEINECKEN: No, tweak is not the right word. As soon as I said it I didn't like it.

LEHMER: You don't want to hurt someone; you want to engage someone--

HEINECKEN: Right.

LEHMER: --on a cerebral level. But if you offend someone, they're going to shut you off. They're going to slam the door on your face in a sense--

HEINECKEN: Well, it's not so much what--

LEHMER: --and they're not going to allow you into their own head.

HEINECKEN: Well, that's no problem. That's up to the individual. But when it becomes a public nuisance and it begins to be in the paper and, in the case of Jock Sturges or Sally Mann, it actually stops your life for a period of



time, that's wrong. Maybe it's interesting during this period of time where new art forms like performance and video are opening up avenues for sexuality and for expression of sexuality because it's a person there doing a theatrical thing of some kind as opposed to a painting which you can turn to the wall or you can take down. But when you've got Karen Finley doing something in front of x number of people, and it's offensive to someone who has not even seen it, that's a real-- I don't want to get off into this; this is another whole tape. But I don't see anything happening to prevent it.

LEHMER: Yeah. I guess what I find interesting about this is not necessarily the movement of anti-pornography or the attempt to broaden the definition of that, but that you did hint at it being what I would call a basic tenet of communication. That is, when you have an idea in your head, you select the words that you think your listener will understand. Depending upon who you're talking to, you're going to use different language or different terms or different means to get your point across. In a certain sense, you have different work, and then there is the responsibility of the artist and/or curator to understand the audience as much as possible.

HEINECKEN: Well, one never thinks-- I don't think of the audience. I think all of this comes later. I mean,



something is done, made, finished, whatever. Nobody is putting any restrictions on what you can do.

LEHMER: Right.

HEINECKEN: But that could be next.

Anyway, my point is, then, in my case and in most artists' cases you pass that responsibility on to the dealer, to the curator. In other words, I would never sell a piece directly to an individual unless I knew that individual, because then you're the bandit, right? Whereas as soon as a gallery or a museum takes that work, it's their problem, it's not the artist's problem. The artist might get hurt by it, but it's their choice. They know what is legal, they know what is not. They know what their constituents are and what they want. I should expand on that at some point. The idea of the dealer is so important to me, not just for this reason but because I don't want to take time trying to figure out what's appropriate to do. I don't want to take time looking at twenty pictures and saying, "Well, this is better than that." It all goes to them. It's their task to figure that out. If you don't have a dealer, a good dealer, it can be hell. So I'm very lucky that way. I mean, to get an ongoing relationship with Pace[Wildenstein] gallery is much better than twenty-five one-man shows. That's finally a situation--if I can stay with them-- All those



headaches are gone. You don't have to see anybody, you don't have to sell anything to anybody, you don't have to go to dinner with anybody. That's all their responsibility to do that. Of course, if they can't do it well, then eventually you lose it, because there's got to be money produced there for somebody. But that's not my concern. The most important fact of the dealer is that it's a veil for me between what I do and what the public sees. I don't want that responsibility, so they're the veil. I don't want to meet the collectors, not because I don't like people that buy my work; I don't want to take the time to have yet another dinner with somebody who wants to say that they've had someone to dinner. That's a waste of time. The gallery can take care of all that. They're the go-between.

LEHMER: All right. That's a good start. What I'd like to do for the remainder of this session is to expand some ideas we had last week about SPE.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. When you said that earlier, I wanted to say something more about LACPS [Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies] too, which was the local version of SPE.

LEHMER: Okay. So we have previously talked about SPE on more of a social level, which is incredibly important. That's where people come together.





My experience is--as I've talked to you off tape, and I've just mentioned one brief thing--I really went from a somewhat active community in San Francisco to a very much nonactive environment. Then, when I began to feel truly out of touch-- In other words, when I did not understand the meaning of what I was reading, then I had to try to figure out how to get back in touch. First I was thinking of graduate school, but I had no idea what the graduate schools' programs were like then. Unlike institutions that somehow sustain themselves, like Harvard [University], Yale [University], and Princeton [University], art programs will ebb and flow based on faculty and those kinds of things that make programs very vulnerable. So I turned to the Society for Photographic Education as a means of trying to figure out what was going on where at that time. It was like twenty years after I had actually first heard about SPE. Something that I found of value in that was that I could begin to get a handle on what programs were out there and what they were trying to accomplish.

You were one of the initial people involved in SPE, and I think we had discussed earlier that it was pretty much started up by-- Was it Nathan Lyons?

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah.

LEHMER: Henry Holmes Smith.



HEINECKEN: Yes. You know, it was a small group, but no one else in that small group would have initiated it, because they were all in universities or whatever, or not. But Nathan had the George Eastman House as a vehicle-- I mean, their job is to collect photographs, right? He was a curator or whatever he was, so he had the venue for it, and he had the institutional support for it. I certainly wouldn't have had that even if I'd had the idea, or Carl [Chiarenza] or someone like that. So he was very important as an individual but also because he had access to certain venues.

LEHMER: Carl Chiarenza?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. But I think your description of why you or what you found its value to be is in fact what it was developed to do. It was to be a kind of outreach--if that's the right word--into various communities via traveling exhibitions, via having meetings all over the country so that people in any locale could get to a meeting. Then the regional meetings were--I think I actually had something to do with that idea--to decentralize it, so that West Coast, East Coast, Texas, whatever, would have their own annual meetings so that people from that locale, even if they couldn't go to New York or some other major city, would have some sense that there was a body of people and a body of material that was



accessible to them as teachers.

LEHMER: Now, there were some original ideas defining the role of the photographic educator. But the function of the institution itself--SPE, Society for Photographic Education or educators?--some people wanted it to be nothing more than a group of educators so that they could discuss on a peer level--

HEINECKEN: Right, exactly.

LEHMER: We discussed off tape some of the other avenues that people wanted to pursue. Can you describe some of those ideas as to the various objectives or directions in which SPE was being tugged or nudged?

HEINECKEN: Well, that's interesting. I think the quick answer was to use the constituency of the organization as a democratic voice to determine what would seem to be-- Let's say, what would I need as an SPE member or a board member or whatever in my locale or institution that would help me be a better educator? That's basically what the thing is about. However that evolves is certainly based on the strength of conviction of any of the individuals involved in it, which is very clear to me now. The conviction of the feminist movement, the gay movement, the political movement, those convictions are stronger and held by more people than any other convictions are at this point. It's a young, active, a little bit angry group of



people, and the programming reflects that, I think. And it should. People--not like me, necessarily--who aren't interested in that simply don't have to go to it. Nobody is forcing you to go to this thing, right? But if you feel something is wrong with it and you have a different venue or a different agenda, then you have to speak for that. Maybe there are other people who feel that. I mean, it's an organism, really, and it's a good organism, I think, in that way. But it's hard to do.

You know, I don't think there was ever a plan. Maybe Nathan had a plan or something, but it was never revealed. It was always just something like, "Well, what do you think we ought to do?" You discuss it and you do it.

I don't think there was ever a meeting that I had anything to do with or went to that wasn't felt to be really, by a certain group of individuals-- Old people were doing this, people who no longer mattered. Henry Holmes Smith they just vilified at one point, which was ugly.

The growth of the ideology about what would constitute the programming, which is all SPE is, really-- It was just a program once a year that is supposed to illuminate what is on people's minds and things. I've lost my train of thought there. So it's an organism that's reacting to social, political, and artistic





changes.

LEHMER: So there was this group of educators that were pulled together by Nathan, and with--

HEINECKEN: Who were the only people--maybe there were twelve, maybe more--he could identify in the country that seemed to have an already developing interest in photography as an academic or an artistic subject and a viable art force. It's not like we didn't have-- And I went into this the other day. There is a long history of individuals who were behaving as artists, but there was never, until 1960, something that could be seen as an educational force, because there wasn't anything like that. There were no photography courses taught as art, basically, before all this started. So that was the role. That was and continues to be the idea of it. It's just that the focus and the particularization of attitudes that people hold about the photographs they make is changing. It always has, and it will continue to do so.

The most interesting thing is the electronic stuff entering all of this suddenly, because now it's not only the artistic and political choices that individuals make; now you've got this new media which is obviously capable of completely altering photography as we know it into something else. This is a big thing. It's like when video came versus film.



LEHMER: It reminds me of the early seventies when we first started to see performance being done in the gallery.

HEINECKEN: Right.

LEHMER: It was not an artifact per se. It wasn't something that you could go in, purchase, take home, and put on your wall. This is expanding the definition of what art is.

HEINECKEN: But see, I don't think any university person, myself or anyone, would sit down and suddenly invent performance. "Hey, let's start this!" I mean, individuals started this. When you see a certain number of individuals doing something which you recognize as important and interesting and it is obviously in an art vein, it takes universities ten years to figure it out before they accept it. They do that all the time. Universities have a slow process, as do organizations like SPE. It takes a while for them to make their first woman chair. It takes time to make the women's caucus [of the College Art Association].

What I'm getting at is this electronic thing. I joked--I forget what I said--that you could call it the "Society for Pornographic Electronics." You wouldn't have to change the stationery or anything. You would just stay with those letters but change the name of it, right? Or



"Society for Photographic Electronics" or something like that, but "pornographic" is better. [laughs] There was a lot of sexual stuff going on at this last meeting, which was very interesting. I didn't see all of it, but you could smell it.

LEHMER: Some terms that we had discussed when we last met in regards to SPE and the history of it, "educator" versus "education"--

HEINECKEN: Oh, right. Well, the idea there was simply that they want to change the name to "educator" because in their eyes it was-- Again, they were slow to recognize it really wasn't just about the educators, because the students are the clients, so to speak, of all of this. You can do it, but it's wrong to, let's say, construct a diagnosis for someone when you don't know what their illness is or something like that.

LEHMER: There were people who wanted to exclude the client, the student, so that they could talk more directly about--

HEINECKEN: What to teach, how to teach, the profession of teaching--

LEHMER: Then there were others who--

HEINECKEN: --in this medium which was like a new device in the art idea.

LEHMER: There was a need for people to say, "Well, what



the hell do we do? We're in this responsible position--"

HEINECKEN: Well, you've hit it exactly. That's exactly how a lot of those people felt. I think they--not to name anyone--just felt incompetent about dealing with the students per se on a day-to-day basis because of their and my inadequacy to deal with everything like that. So the organization was supposed to be set up to answer some questions, to help people prepare how to proceed with teaching. Of course, the view was that the students were a nuisance in that. I didn't feel that way.

LEHMER: Well, what did you feel the role of the student client was in SPE? You're hinting that you were in support of their involvement.

HEINECKEN: And their input, yeah.

LEHMER: Because of the fact that you couldn't--

HEINECKEN: But I don't think that that problem is ever solved. It's simply that the group of students who were unruly are now full professors in institutions. All of them or most of them are, because those jobs were available for those people. I don't think the nineties is producing students that are nearly as anxiety-ridden about what is going on around them as they were and probably never will again. It's a docile-- But it is the young faculty people who are making the noise, understandably, and wanting a change.





I remember-- I think I was chairman at the time that this happened, or at least I was on the board. I immediately had to point out to them that the financial base of the organization was not in the membership but was in the local people. You go to Chicago and you've got five thousand students there, all of whom can pay ten dollars or whatever. The only way you can finance this is to allow them to be participants and not restrict them from being active participants, not just an audience for it.

LEHMER: The makeup of SPE was predominantly artists and a curriculum of fine arts. There were other associations--

HEINECKEN: Not necessarily just that. I mean, there was always the technical thing going on. There was always the--which I objected to a lot--interference by the product people, like [Eastman] Kodak [Company] and whatever, because I just didn't think that that money was clean necessarily. But that's aside from the point.

Well, I remember when the CAA [College Art Association] was the only thing I'd ever been to, and this is pretty closely modeled on that kind of-- These things are not without their political forces and their factions. All of these things are very important to it. So what I'm saying is that it wasn't solely the idea of how to make this into art or how to teach it as art, because there were always other considerations--losing, let's say, the



spirit for documentation through photography or making everything kind of a formal art idea as opposed to someone like [Garry] Winogrand or whomever. I mean, some of those issues were always and still are present.

LEHMER: But that's different than teaching commercial photography, which would be like a seminar at SPE. I don't see a seminar at SPE where you--

HEINECKEN: No, but there were such things, but slowly or over whatever period of time people simply weren't going to those things. If we set up something that somebody wants to talk about, like commercial photography, and no one shows up--two people or something-- You get the picture. I mean, it's changing. It shifts all the time.

LEHMER: So then the base--

HEINECKEN: And those people who were, let's say, in commercial or applied photography came to understand that they wanted to train people to go into the industry and make a living at it. Well, that's fine. You've got this other group of people who are really thinking of the art idea, which brings up the problems that any artist has. How to make a living is always a problem. So it was like saying to them, "Look, you people are in a profession. You have RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology], you have all of these places which are teaching it. These guys are going to work right away; they're making a good living.



Why are you interested in SPE? We're not going to be talking about these things. We're trying to talk about support systems for people who are preparing themselves to be some kind of artist or something other than a commercial photographer." I keep using the word "artist" because that's my take on it, but obviously a lot of people didn't think of certain kinds of photographs as art and still don't. There has to be something that makes it art, but I don't know what that is yet.

LEHMER: Correct me on this. I'm going to use some words to describe the evolutionary history of SPE. It starts with educators, then broadens to students, to historians, curators, critics, administrators, dealers--

HEINECKEN: Yes, but not the dealers so much.

LEHMER: Then it began to develop more specialized areas, such as the women's movement, the women's caucus--

HEINECKEN: But interestingly, that's developed within the structure of SPE. It's a vital part of the-- It is a by-law caucus as opposed to--as I mentioned the other day-- the curators. While they go to SPE, they really have their own organization. In some ways it's like the first SPE meetings, where they limited the number of people that could attend, for which we had a motive in the beginning, which changed later. So they recognized, because of what happened to SPE in terms of the burgeoning growth of it



out of hand, what the real issues for them were. They set up their own thing where they could discuss that. They can participate in SPE if they wish, but I think they have maybe forty or fifty people, which you can handle. This curator's group is called Oracle, a very highblown title.

Then you mentioned administrators--I think they have about twenty people. They have an organization that meets annually, Photographic Administrators.

LEHMER: Who would fall into that category?

HEINECKEN: Paul Berger is one of them. I've got this information.

LEHMER: Now, he's an educator, like a department chair?

HEINECKEN: He's chairman of the art department [at the University of Washington], so it's not just photography.

LEHMER: Would the director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art, for instance, also fall into the administrator's organization?

HEINECKEN: No, these are all teachers or administrators and educators, as far as I know.

LEHMER: In educational groups, okay.

We're almost out of tape, but what we want to pick up with next time would be LACPS. I think I want to get on the end of the tape what we're going to continue with, because it will make it easier for me to start out with





questions next time.

LACPS is the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies and in a sense it is a spinoff of SPE. It is now the baton in the relay race which connects educators and artists with the community. It's a noncommercial gallery.

HEINECKEN: Right--

LEHMER: I'm sorry, you were going to say something?

HEINECKEN: Only to remind myself to talk about some of the early galleries in Los Angeles like Ohio Silver [Gallery] and Angel Eye [Gallery] and Camerawork [Gallery] and things like that, which were the local outlets for some of this.

LEHMER: Well, we'll talk about their objectives and why they were created. There was an unfulfilled need that we should define in Los Angeles. We also should talk about the climate of Southern California, in which I feel you were a very instrumental key player.

HEINECKEN: Well, I'll just mention it so we can think about it. There were no museum collections here like there would have been in Chicago or San Francisco. There still aren't.



TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

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LEHMER: I want to extend from SPE [Society for Photographic Education] into LACPS [Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies] and other galleries, museums, their role, and a brief history. During your time as a faculty member at UCLA, can you think of some of the important happenings with galleries and museum exhibitions? I can back up to *The Family of Man*. Maybe we should start with the Museum of Modern Art briefly and how that photography program started. Then we can go into Southern California or some of the smaller, independent galleries.

HEINECKEN: Okay. Well, let's look at, say, 1960 or sometime early, '60-something. It seems to me that the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Art Institute of Chicago and I think to a lesser extent the San Francisco museum, then called--

LEHMER: The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

HEINECKEN: No, not then it wasn't. [San Francisco Museum of Art]

LEHMER: Let me interrupt you. What was Chicago's museum called?

HEINECKEN: Well, it's called the Art Institute of Chicago as opposed to the Schools of the Art Institute [of



Chicago].

LEHMER: Right.

HEINECKEN: But all I'm getting at is that those were probably the three places that I know about or that would have had enough material that you would know about it in the United States. Los Angeles had, as far as I could see--maybe there were pockets of things here and there--nothing like those three places. I think, interestingly enough-- I don't know when [John] Szarkowski-- He started in 1960, I think the same year that I started teaching. So kind of by default in some ways his interest was--plus the holdings of the Museum of Modern Art were--basically documentary photographs, *The Family of Man* being the precursor to all of that, which was [Edward] Steichen's work. Steichen was still there in 1960, but he was emeritus or whatever. He was still a very strong force in their decisions, as was the board. So anyway, that collection had that slant to it.

The Art Institute of Chicago was similar in a way. The force of collecting or exhibiting would have been documentary photography, but I think they were given the Julien Levy collection, which was basically surrealist and dada photographs. So the Art Institute had that material and would show it periodically along with the more familiar documentary photographs.



The San Francisco museum, their collection was basically the-- Oh, what are we calling them here?

LEHMER: The California school?

HEINECKEN: Yeah, right. I mean Ansel Adams, Imogene Cunningham-- What are they calling themselves now?

LEHMER: Well, there's F/64--

HEINECKEN: Group F/64, right.

LEHMER: Wynn Bullock, Imogen Cunningham, Dorothea Lange-- She wasn't a member of F/64, I don't think, was she?

HEINECKEN: No, but, I mean, there's that-- In Northern California, for instance, the photography program at what is now the San Francisco Art Institute was started by Ansel Adams and Minor White. So maybe through Minor White you had a little bit more mysticism or something, but basically it was the sharp photograph or what have you. It was a Northern Californian attitude based on the F/64 premise. But those three museums were the only places that I recall where you could see much. Los Angeles, let's say in the early sixties, I don't think there was anyplace like the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art]. It was not the County Museum; it was a fraction of the museum of science and industry [Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art]. It was downtown, next to the USC [University of Southern California] campus. It





was a sleepy place. I don't think there was much photography there to begin with, but they certainly had no idea that this was an art--

LEHMER: It's really a young museum.

HEINECKEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. So when they moved to the site that they're now in--

LEHMER: Mid-Wilshire.

HEINECKEN: I don't know what year that was-- There was still no photography department. It was very staid--you know, a painting gallery, basically, with collectors beginning to develop in Los Angeles. Four or five, six families built that museum. But they built it--and this is not cynical--because they wanted some kind of showcase for modern art or for contemporary art, because that's what they were collecting.

LEHMER: Oh, really?

HEINECKEN: We don't need to name the people that founded the County Museum and subsequently donated their work. It's a very regular way that these things happen. But there were no photographs and no curator or anything like that. Now, I don't know exactly when the photography department started, but it was definitely something that came out of prints and drawings, which would have been the logical division for handling that scale and for that kind of storage. Certainly there was activity. I don't know



whether-- Kathy [Kathleen] Gauss certainly wasn't the first person there; there was someone before that I can't think of. But it was a sleepy situation. So there wasn't much going on there at all.

LEHMER: Time-wise, where does the Grunwald [Center for the Graphic Arts] fall into this?

HEINECKEN: I was going to get to that, actually.

LEHMER: I just thought of that.

HEINECKEN: In the early sixties--I didn't curate it--I arranged to get a traveling exhibition from the Museum of Modern Art, which was Robert Frank, [Jacques-Henri] Lartigue, [Aaron] Siskind, someone else. They had put this traveling show together to show you four different kinds of photographs, including the Lartigue, which was charming and historic and whatever. I got the UCLA [Wight] Art Gallery to take that exhibition, and we did a small promotion of it beyond the normal kinds of things. That was like the first exhibition that they had done for years and years that had anything to do with photography, and it's because I badgered them to do it. I was working for the gallery at the time.

In 1920-something-- Barbara Morgan told me this story. When she was a student at UCLA she helped organize and hang the first photography show that UCLA had ever done, which was an Edward Weston show traveled by somebody



or whatever. UCLA--I learned this subsequently--later acquired some Weston photographs, which are probably still sitting over there someplace because of that exhibition. So this time period is all a little bit blurry.

I mentioned earlier that the role of the UCLA [University] Extension courses in photography was interesting or pivotal for me, because that's where I started teaching. That's where I developed ideas about teaching. That, for instance, was the only game in town where any adult student could pay their twenty-five dollars and take these courses. And we ran them all within the first-- Not in the new building but in the building previous to the one that we are now in. But anyway, that's really the start of that.

Then subsequently--I'd have to look at these dates--I did two other large exhibitions at UCLA, which were in the Wight Gallery, with catalogs and whatever. At that point, through [E.] Maurice Bloch, who was the director of the Grunwald, I convinced him and their board that they should add photography to this, because, again, it was consistent with the prints, drawings, works on paper kind of idea that they were limited to. Fred Grunwald was a collector of prints. His donation of those materials started the whole thing going, and [E.] Maurice Bloch ran it for years until he retired. He was easily convinced that



photography was happening. He knew the history of photography and how it related to printmaking because he was an art historian. At that point they began to collect, largely through donations. There wasn't a huge budget. It never was a major part of the budget and still isn't.

I was down at the [UCLA at the] Armand Hammer [Museum of Art and Cultural Center] the other day donating some stuff to them. The Grunwald Center is now located there. Now photography is certainly an important aspect of what they collect. There are programs in photography there. She showed me their schedule of stuff. It was clear that photography is an important part of what they are doing there, but their collection is not focused at all. It's like whatever they could get someone to give to them. I had the graduate students, as you know, put pictures in there each time when they graduated. They were not forced or obligated, but were encouraged to put three pictures in there: one picture that they had made either in the first year of their graduate studies or prior to that, and then another one somehow in the middle, and then finally a picture or two from their M.F.A. [master of fine arts] show. So that was the idea of preserving in some sense what students were in the M.F.A. program. It adds to the collection, presuming that some of these people are going





to be more or less well known later and you have some of their early pictures.

LEHMER: That's good. You mentioned that you had curated two exhibitions other than the ones that were being circulated. What were those? Can you remember?

HEINECKEN: The first one I organized around the idea that the Grunwald was going to be an important collection of photographs at some point. We had the university's full support through the Grunwald. And really, I guess I couched it in terms of my personal friendships with people. I said, "Look. I'm trying to do this thing here." I got, I guess, twenty or twenty-five people to donate two or three pictures or whatever they could to the Grunwald, which was the basis of the exhibition. This opened the idea that the Grunwald was really going to be a place where you would see contemporary photographs, and the pitch was, of course, that it would be an important place to have your photographs. It may not be in your lifetime or whatever, but-- Everybody that I asked, with a few exceptions, was very generous. So that was another kind of basis of contemporary photographs that they owned, which were, of course, donated. I don't know what year that was, but we could find out.

LEHMER: Was that like mid-sixties, do you think?

HEINECKEN: No, it was later than that.



LEHMER: Late sixties?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. But in 1976--I remember that date--we did another show, which was really Gerald Nordland's. He was then the director of the Wight Gallery and also very interested in photography, always had been, and knew more about it than most directors of museums would have at that point. So he got about four or five grants from different organizations to buy photographs. At that point we sat down and assessed what we had, what we thought we could afford, what was going to be the direction of the holdings in that place as opposed to maybe the County Museum, which was starting to do something also. It was supposed to represent the full spectrum of what photographs were at that point in time. And there was a lot of experimental work that otherwise you wouldn't have seen anyplace like that. If you look through there, that black catalog for the M.F.A. show has a listing of all the photographs they owned up until that point. Okay, so that's the institutional thing.

Then UCLA Extension, which I started to talk about, was, let's say after the first three or four years, clearly the most-sought-after courses in the Extension arts programs. The adults were beginning to understand that something was going on here. The problem was that we never had enough space to develop it beyond that basement



at UCLA. We could never really get any darkrooms other than what we could provide them there. But for whatever period of time that was the most important teaching situation.

Then at some point-- I was trying to think of her name this morning, and I can't-- I'll think of it later. But this woman was an undergraduate student in the art department who actually started the idea of LACPS. She went on to become a pretty high-powered attorney. I forget what field she's in; maybe a defense attorney or something. I talk to her occasionally still. She's a successful person but very fondly remembers how she--and there were a couple of other students--really sat down and figured this thing out. They had their first meeting in this woman's apartment. There were about five people with her there, like Darryl [Curran], myself, and a couple of other people. I just said, "Look, this is a terrific idea. You've got to do it, but I can't take on any more than what I've got." Clearly this was something that in a city of this size, seeing Extension turning people away constantly and not allowing people actually to repeat courses, which was a big demand, obviously this was the right idea, and it simply took off.

They never really had a place for a long time. I can't remember the history of this exactly, but they never



had any darkrooms or facilities of their own. But there were places in the city, like the public schools all had darkrooms, and somehow they got hooked up with some of those. They could rent those darkrooms on weekends when the students weren't using them. So little by little they became a functioning organization.

She at some point--probably when she went to law school--dropped out of it. But people like Barbara [Pearlman] were very active in it. Darryl Curran was very active. I was as active as I preferred to be. So LACPS was a very important thing.

Sometimes, before they had any viable space, they would just find someplace where they could hang an exhibition and put it together--you know, put it up for a week or so and do mailers and whatever. Of course, now it's grown into what seems to be a very effective organization with grants from the government and the city and the county and whatever.

Then, at the same time, because of this mushrooming interest in the medium, I think that one of the first galleries in L.A. was Angel Eye. I remember that name. They actually had a space. The guy lent what I think was his studio downtown and maybe someplace where he lived, and he just dedicated like half of that to this Angel Eye Gallery, which was purportedly going to sell photographs.





They did exhibitions. Maybe he sold some, maybe not. But it was a place, along with LACPS, which never had an exhibition space per se, where you could see whoever this guy chose to show on a monthly basis. I think that must have lasted a couple of years, and then it folded up.

LEHMER: I have a question about Angel Eye. It was a private gallery?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. It was supposed to be a dealer. I mean, that was the idea of it.

LEHMER: Okay.

HEINECKEN: I think those things probably were happening all over the country. It's like somebody gets a hot idea-- Not that they'd expect to make any money, but they'd expect that they can have this space and they think they are doing a civic duty, and maybe they can make a living out of it. I don't think anyone ever really accomplished that without some sacrifices being made by that individual or people giving them money and stuff like that. But Angel Eye was an interesting place, because it was all local people, and you could go to a real art opening.

And then I think the other place that might have-- I think Angel Eye was the first one, but the other place was called Ohio Silver Gallery and was run by a husband and wife, Randy [Randolph] Laub and Claudia Laub. I don't know where they appeared from, but I think probably out of



Extension courses. He was, I think even then, a very good framemaker, just a real craftsman at frames and matting and stuff like that. So they had that kind of a service going on at this same time. I liked the title; it was great. Ohio was the name of the street it was on down in West L.A., between Santa Monica [Boulevard] and Wilshire [Boulevard] or something like that. It was their house and they had simply gutted a couple of rooms, and then the framing service was in the garage. They must have lasted at least two or three years, also. I'm not exactly sure of the time period.

LEHMER: Again, this was a private--?

HEINECKEN: Yeah, but this was a much more organized situation than Angel Eye was with this one guy. I mean, you'd go to Angel Eye and it was supposed to be open, but it wasn't. But they ran Ohio Silver as professional people. I forget what she was trained as, but I think she had a real job of some kind. The Ohio Silver was the "Hi-ho, Silver" Lone Ranger thing, and it was the photographic silver, and it was nice. Everybody liked this title and they liked to go there, because they were friendly and it was a social situation. They did a lot of good work, one of which was the Bill [William] Doherty exhibition when he died. They were very eager to take that exhibition. They put some money into the catalog, helped to curate and



overmat and everything like that. It was a really nice thing. They were always very open people like that. Then I think their marriage dissolved, maybe partly because of the gallery. He continued to make individual frames for people and then moved to Santa Fe [New Mexico]. Now I think he's there making frames and furniture. So that was that.

LEHMER: And the date for Angel Eye?

HEINECKEN: I guess I'm just going to have to say mid-sixties. We can look this up.

LEHMER: And Ohio Silver?

HEINECKEN: Same.

LEHMER: Mid-sixties?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. And then the other place was Camerawork Gallery, which I think was earlier than the other two I mentioned. The first site was Costa Mesa [California], I think. John [P.] Lamkin was this guy's name. He was a student of John Upton, who taught during this whole time period at-- What's it called?

LEHMER: Orange Coast College.

HEINECKEN: Orange Coast College, then Community College. So Lamkin got the bug and opened this place called Camerawork that was a storefront situation, which at least had the look of a gallery. I mean, it wasn't at somebody's house.



LEHMER: When do you guess that was? 'Seventy or--?

HEINECKEN: Well, let's say '70 for now. I don't know.

[John] Upton would know this, for instance. Darryl would remember much more about this if we want to give him a call and find out. Then this same gallery moved to Corona Del Mar [California], which is more of a resort city than Costa Mesa. I don't know how long that lasted. I'm not sure what he did for a living, but at some point this was getting too much for him. He couldn't afford to do it, but he wanted to do it more. He moved it to Oakland [California], I think, or Richmond [California], or somewhere in the East Bay.

LEHMER: That's a big jump.

HEINECKEN: The whole thing. I mean, he just packed up and went up there. I think maybe John Upton ran the one down here for a while before he couldn't do that either. But the name Camerawork went with Lamkin to the Bay. And then, of course, he either sold it or gave it away, and now it becomes Camerawork, which is a big deal in San Francisco with directors and a brand-new building this month and everything.

I'm maybe forgetting some other places, but there was moderate interest in the medium in the city through these three or four or five kinds of galleries. And UCLA was an important part of it.





Then the other thing I wanted to mention was at one point Darryl, Jerry McMillan, and myself--but mostly Darryl and Jerry had the time to worry about it--became discouraged with the Extension program, because it's beginning to be a place that has difficulties and demands and wants to open up the courses beyond what we had considered appropriate. Todd Walker, I think, was another person involved with this. We were very close to opening a private school that the three or four of us would try to finance, find a building, maybe even work through Extension but have it something that was separate from the administration of UCLA. We got this so far as to really look into the finances of it and figure out exactly how much it would cost. Could it be self-supporting? Could whoever was teaching there, of course, get paid to teach? The presumption was that they would take all of those excess students who couldn't get into Extension courses. We knew who they were. It was just a matter of a list. The teachers would be the same people that were teaching Extension. The price would be more, but you would have darkrooms available somehow. I was very disgruntled with Extension at that point so I was like, "Great for me." I didn't want to screw with Extension anymore.

LEHMER: Robert, this is kind of frustrating, but again,



what kind of a time frame are we looking at? Is this mid-seventies or--?

HEINECKEN: Yeah, it's really difficult. I don't know. I don't really have any way to look it up easily.

LEHMER: I'm just trying to get an idea of the evolution.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. Well, make a note. We'll talk to Darryl, because I think Darryl was involved in all of these one way or the other. Also, John Upton could tell us if we need a date for these things.

LEHMER: Yeah, that might be kind of interesting. I don't know if this is something we would put into the text in parentheses or something.

HEINECKEN: Well, if it's important to get a date, we'll just have to find those dates--roughly.

Similar things were happening in San Francisco with Jack [W.] Welpott at San Francisco State [University]. There were other small galleries, but the names escape me. There was a similar situation going on there. The advantage that they had there was that they had this museum collection, and they had a curator of photography at the museum.

Things were happening there on a minor scale, certainly, which we didn't have here. I don't know exactly at what point the County Museum did add this division to the prints and drawing thing, and I don't know



who the first person was to do it. It couldn't have been Kathy Gauss; it must have been someone before her. But she was the second one, certainly. With [Robert] Sobieszek coming there--what?--five years ago or something like that, the commitment of the museum to photography as a division of their programming is clear. I mean, it's as established as it is in San Francisco or wherever. And we have probably four or five other smaller galleries, workshops, or darkrooms that-- Like there's the L.A. Center for Photographic Studies. Suffice to say that there's still a private interest in the workshop idea, the darkroom idea, for people who I think view themselves as potentially interesting photographers.

Of course, now we have five or seven photography galleries, all of which seem to be doing well. G. Ray Hawkins [Gallery] was the first one, I think. David Fahey worked for him and split off. Stephen White [Gallery] made a bundle. The city was successful with this later in the time period and I think probably now has, along with San Francisco, Chicago, New York, the same number of galleries--not necessarily New York, but in Chicago or San Francisco--private galleries, dealers.

LEHMER: Do you have some idea as to--?

HEINECKEN: One more thing before I forget. During the same period of time when UCLA Extension was the only place



that the public had access to-- I think some of the other university branches and colleges began to open up departments including extension courses. So the public or the student population of the city probably began to be exposed to the possibility of courses in photography to an increasing degree. And again, at this point places like [California State University] Fullerton or [University of California] Irvine all have-- [University of California] Riverside has that museum [California Museum of Photography]. It's sort of like the educational system woke up somehow, or didn't wake up, but people who went to UCLA, people who went to Extension-- People like Darryl, who will go to teach at places like Fullerton, they open it up, right?

LEHMER: And CalArts [California Institute of the Arts].

HEINECKEN: CalArts was very important, yes. I don't know what year that is.

LEHMER: Well, they started, or they got their facilities, in 1971 or something like that. I don't know if they taught photography right off the bat.

HEINECKEN: I think they did, because I remember going out there. It wasn't in this building, I don't think. Maybe it was or some version of this building, but it was on that site. The guy that they hired to do photography-- what's his name?--Ben Lifson, was a New Yorker. I don't





know how they found him or he found them or whatever, but he became the first head of the photography department. His interests were in very straight, conventional photographs. But he knew why he made that choice, and he knew who the people were. I think at some point whoever the directors were of the school could see that that particular person and that particular kind of program was not appropriate for CalArts, which was developing in ways that were purposefully counter to universities and staid conventional art. I don't know exactly what happened, maybe he quit, maybe he left.

Then John Brumfield took it, I think. He was at least more open to other kinds of things. But then he left, so I don't know the history of that too much.

It was clear, let's say in the seventies and beyond that, that it was definitely an alternative educational institution with ideas that I think most of us perceived to be much better ideas than the ones that the universities were involved in. It was not going to be another painting school. It was going to have theater, it was going to have dance. Everybody was very excited about it. Well, they still are, I think. It's a good school.

But I guess it wasn't until Catherine Lord went there to be the dean or whatever that photography really became an important part of that program. The feminist idea was



brought there also by her. That was the place where you would be exposed to that history, that phenomenon, and that was clearly an alternative to UCLA, which is continually all male as far as tenured people, etc. Then there's the political emphasis on photography. There was again a clear and healthy shift from what the universities would be doing.

LEHMER: It would seem to me that someone like John Baldessari, who was pretty much responsible for the strong development of the art program, would have a lot of influence on the directions that the college might choose photographically.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I don't know exactly how he fit into that. I had known him casually all this time, and we would talk about it, but I don't think he-- You'd have to figure out what time he decided that he was going to burn his paintings. Did he burn them--I'm sure he did--and then went into this new thing. I don't think he ever taught in photography. People who were out there in photography maybe used him somehow or had some sense of what his ideas were. But to this day he doesn't necessarily participate if he doesn't want to in photography situations. He knows that that's not what he's about. I think it was a very clear and effective and smart, professional attitude that he had. I still think



it is.

LEHMER: Why is that?

HEINECKEN: Well, I think it's-- Well, I don't know. The joke would be if you were a photographer and burned all your photographs and went into painting. Nobody does that, right? It wouldn't work; you wouldn't know how to paint. But photography is fairly simple in some sense, and he's brilliant. I mean, I think he's one of the really important people using photographs. But I don't think--and I can't be sure about this--he would have anything to do with people like Ben Lifson, or John Brumfield for that matter. He might be talking to students about photography, and as I had talked to you about teaching through exposition, he certainly did that. I'm trying to get to the right-- See, this is supposition on my part.

At some point I guess Lifson was still there, or Brumfield, but I remember going out there a couple of times at the request of students who were complaining that they didn't have anybody there who would really talk to them about what they were doing. I know I sat on an M.F.A. committee, because they couldn't get enough people together to form that committee, things like that. But I never ran into Baldessari that much. I knew him more as just another artist. And of course, his work is not--



Maybe what I'm getting at is that I'm looking at the way that I handled my career within the system of photography trying to somehow elevate that or increase the importance of that in an art context. A person like Baldessari doesn't do that; he simply takes a whole new shot at it. Not from the standpoint of photography, because that's not what he's about. He uses it sometimes very forcefully, but it's really "concept art" or something like that or just individual Baldessari thinking. He disassociates himself from the medium when it's necessary to do that.

I don't think he ever taught courses in photography. It wouldn't be something he would even think about doing at CalArts or anyplace else. Like coming to UCLA, you know. I don't think he would--I'm just guessing--take a job that had photography tacked on the end of it. It wouldn't be in the picture for him. I don't mean just from a career standpoint. He's just not that kind of a person. That's not what he's interested in.

LEHMER: I understand.

HEINECKEN: And certainly people who were making photographs in that program or any program that coincided with his thinking he would certainly be interested in, but not specifically teaching photography.





LEHMER: It would seem to me--and tell me how you feel about this--that he is trying to break away from the baggage of process. He's careful about his association with photography as a medium. Historically, departments are separated by mediums. The school of art has a photo department, a painting department.

HEINECKEN: But this is not a criticism at all. This is smart. When it's convenient for him to associate with the medium, if it's the right venue or the right exposure or whatever, he does it. There were shows of California photography or something at the Museum of Modern Art, and there was a very limited number of people, five or six or something like that, and he was one, because the curators there recognized that he was important. If you want to see what California photography was about, you can't disinclude him. But it's his decision to do that, because it's the Museum of Modern Art. That's what I would think. It's not Indiana or someplace that's doing this. And I think actually the effect of a person like that is probably greater when it's done from the outside. It's subversive in a sense that way as opposed to being on the inside of that. I don't think that my work has anything more to do with photography than his does, but I associated myself with the teaching profession for a long time, and you get that label, and he, for whatever reason,



did not choose to do that.

The joke I told you is true: you don't burn your photographs. Nobody does that. They might burn their photographs and be a writer or something, but you can't do that and make paintings. But if you know painting, you can certainly do those photographs. It's just a minor shift into-- Not minor, but it's a shift into another frame of mind about it.

LEHMER: All right. I think of an area that in California or West Coast art making, photography specifically-- You might look at photography as art making versus documenting. Then there would be what we just touched on: Baldessari's conceptual art and using photography as a tool. Then there's a redefinition of documentary by Allan Sekula. There's kind of an evolution there from straight documentary, FSA [Farm Security Administration]-- I think of what you do as partially appropriation, but that's just kind of a gimmick in a sense. There's consciously on your part a picking up of images and creating an environment with those images to redefine something. It's your own statement, your own idea, but it's using existing images.

HEINECKEN: Right.

LEHMER: I think of George Carlin as someone who's constantly looking as an outsider at our culture with the way we use words. He can make us just burst out laughing



because he can say a word, and the way he says it-- He's masterful at--

HEINECKEN: And Lenny Bruce before him.

LEHMER: And Lenny Bruce.

HEINECKEN: I've had a thought here. I've been using the term "photographist" lately to define what I am.

LEHMER: Photographist?

HEINECKEN: Yes. If you use the word "artist" or anything with "-ist" on it in this language, it means something. I'm not sure how to define that, but "photographist" is perfect. I got this term from--I wish I'd invented it--this writer who is named Arthur Danto. He's one of the most interesting art historians, because he's not an art historian. He's a Ph.D. in philosophy with an interest in art, so his mind is not locked into the history of art, it's the history of thinking. So whenever you see his name, you've got to read it, because he sees through-- I mean, he's just wonderful. Anyway, he did a review of the German photography show that toured, went to New York, and actually came here. He calls them photographists, because they're not photographers. They're just guys like Baldessari.

LEHMER: That reminds me of another term--

HEINECKEN: So now when somebody asks me on the airplane what I do, I say I'm a photographist. And they say,



"What's that?" Then I go back to my book. I don't answer it. But it's a great term, I think.

LEHMER: So we've gone from photography as realistic document-- And when I say that I just stumble over ten trap doors. Maybe there's a challenge there, because anyone who picks up a camera and begins to work with it understands the subjective level of the work, how deceptive the term is that "the photograph never lies," or "a photograph is worth a thousand words." But anybody who picks up a camera knows that--

HEINECKEN: Yeah. Originally, I was told recently, there's a Chinese proverb from ancient times which says, "Scroll painting is worth a thousand words," not photography. Some nineteenth-century person stole that line.

LEHMER: Oh, that's interesting. But I think that it's so incredibly edited, so heavily edited--





TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE TWO

APRIL 27, 1996

LEHMER: It's heavily edited. It's a medium where anybody who picks up a camera and records something realizes that they have a lot of control over how it's exposed or how it is composed. Then you take it one step further where you have to deal with the complexities of not only your own personal statement but the original intent of the work and how you have rearranged that. It's like taking words-- Sheila Pinkel has done work where she'll take a word like "realize," like you realize something, and "r-e-a-l e-y-e-s," from a portrait of an Indian, and it showed his eyes, and then "r-e-a-l l-i-e-s" meaning that something was deceptive.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, to make it happen.

LEHMER: Yeah, but the thing that is interesting with that work is to show how the same sound can mean totally different things or evolve--

HEINECKEN: Especially the English language is weird that way.

LEHMER: Is it? You in a sense carry that on in your own work. Somehow you see the original intent--obviously if it's something that's an advertisement in a magazine--but then you somehow have developed a good ability to look at



things critically, but more than that, with your own perspective, and you begin to gather resource materials and pull them together and then make your own statement. But it's still a critical look as an outsider attacking the culture of a society or observing-- In a sense, I think you're saying maybe we take ourselves too seriously. I don't know exactly if I'm putting words in your mouth. That's a different direction than what Baldessari does with the image versus what Allan Sekula does with the image. I mean, there are some very interesting things that happen here in Los Angeles photographically.

HEINECKEN: Well, while I'm thinking about it, this show at MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art]--I guess it's still there--which housed--

LEHMER: Is it a social documentary?

HEINECKEN: No, it's the history of, let's call it, "concept art" or whatever in Los Angeles, basically. A high percentage of that work involves photography. The rest of it involves the text that explains to you the picture that you're looking at. You wouldn't be able to define what that movement was about without understanding that there has got to be a use of explanation which is counter to what you're seeing. [William] Wegman is a good example of this, I think, not with his dog stuff, necessarily, but in his early photographs and tapes. I



mean, these are kind of buzz words. The whole exhibition--which is then to say the art--could not have existed without people using photographs, not to explain things but to show you things and text to explain things or show you things. So without those combinations of text and photographs we would never have had that consistent a shift into what we call "idea art" or "concept art" or something like that.

It was just very clear to me in seeing the exhibition what was going on there. None of those people would have identified themselves with the art of photography. Quite the opposite. Take Baldessari. Maybe I'm wrong, but he takes a picture of something and does something to it. He doesn't manipulate the photograph. He puts a dot on it, or he puts texts over it, or he puts it in sequence or whatever. It's not manipulated in the way that I do, for instance. I mean, I want to use the material that people think they've seen before or they have seen before and simply physically do something to it rather than use it as a kind of element in the work. I don't know if this is the right way to approach this. Its relation to society has to do not necessarily with what I'm putting into it. I mean, that helps. It's really because they're seeing familiar pictures in a way they've never seen before. So if you see a pornographic picture in negative, it's a



simple shift, the simplest thing you could do. But you can't be offended by it. It's weird, isn't it? You know it's pornography, but it's not real, it's reversed. If that offends you, then you've got to go not to the picture but to the intent of the picture, and then you could say, "Well, that's an intention which is pornographic" or something like that. But you can't be offended by the picture, because it's not-- You can't read it.

But there are other people-- See, there's another thing that happens in here. This is just sort of the history of this. At some point the idea of using photography, used like-- Robert Cumming is a very good example. His is very straightforward photography, but it's made from contrived materials. I would say most of the interesting photographs made then and now are those kinds of pictures.

LEHMER: They're contrived?

HEINECKEN: Well, they're staged.

LEHMER: I think of John Divola, JoAnn Callis--

HEINECKEN: Yes. The photograph is simply the medium by which you explain whatever it is that you're interested in. It's not photography in the sense that we want to remember it or that we want a picture of Aunt Elsie. How you use the photograph is not as important as do you take it from nature or do you take it from the studio. These





are completely different worlds, right? And that separates documentary from something else. It's not the way that the photograph is made, but is the photograph preconceived to be something which you construct to photograph? I don't do that, and Baldessari, as far as I can see, doesn't do that. His photographs--sometimes he takes them from other sources, sometimes he makes them himself--are not casual photographs when he puts dots on them or whatever. They can't be. Nobody puts a red dot over Aunt Elsie's face.

There's another point here--I'm glad I thought of this because it's something that I usually would have thought of as primary in teaching anybody about this--and that is to connect it directly to language. Say you have a language, right? You have all kinds of structural things that language-- Language is wonderful. You can take the same ten words which are a logical sentence of some kind that everybody understands, and you can reverse the order of the words. You then have a different thing. You still pronounce the words, but they don't make sense, because the structure has shifted. Eventually that idea becomes poetry. So if it's a poetic idea as opposed to, let's call it, literature or some kind of writing, it's just a flexible set of conditions with which you can do anything.



A photograph is exactly the same kind of thing. You say "tree," and an image comes to your mind. It's not a particular tree, but it's a tree. You can say "green tree"-- I'm rambling a little bit here. But the point is that it's the context in which the photograph finds itself which determines its meaning, just like language and the sequence of things. The fact that we pronounce two different words which mean two different things but are spelled the same way in this language, no other language in the world would do that. It's just nuts. The English language is the predominant form for most of the poetry. You can't read poetry in a foreign language and get it really, but you can see the structure of it as you're reading it. Even though you don't know what the words are, you know it's poetry by the way it's laid out and so on. It's not sentences, paragraphs, columns. It's not that.

I think that the easiest way to teach people about photography is to simply say, "It's language. Think of it that way." The relationship of sequencing to language is obviously a literary idea. If you invent a word like some writers do, you don't know what it means, but it rhymes, or it's structurally the correct kind of word even though you don't need to identify its exact meaning. So you can have a very good sentence structure to explain a



particular idea, which is kind of what a documentary photograph does. You want to put it in the order of the words correctly so that we read it correctly, which is then called a good photograph, if everything that you want to be in there is there. Robert Frank is excellent at this, for instance. You sequence them like language. Then you have a kind of poetic structure using ten very straightforward pictures, but it's put into a language structure. You see the point I'm making?

LEHMER: Yeah. John Collier was the first person-- The most lasting impressions that I have of my early photography education--

HEINECKEN: He was an anthropologist, basically.

LEHMER: A visual anthropologist.

HEINECKEN: Probably the first one to use that term.

LEHMER: That's right. He was considered the father of that or the creator of that. But I could see him in his older years--that was back in the early seventies, and he kept going and kept going--coming into class. We'd have our work up on the wall with pushpins. He'd come in, and he would just come up to you real fast, almost startle you, and pointing to his hearing aid he'd say, "Speak into this. I can't hear well." Then he would go up and grab photographs and take them off the wall and switch their order and jam the pushpins in--and destroy the picture



probably--then all of a sudden you'd look at it and go, "Holy God, it's totally different." He showed us physically how sequence has such an influence on what's being said. [tape recorder off]

Okay, what I think we're trying to accomplish here is an attempt at defining some of the directions that people have taken in their artwork with the use of photography. I think of that statement I have used to help people understand certain photography or certain movements or interests by saying that there is less of an objective of photographers making art and that it has evolved to artists making photographs or using photographs to make art. I think that's kind of what we're hinting at with Baldessari, since he doesn't want to be defined as a photographer but as an artist who uses photography.

HEINECKEN: Well, we don't know what he thinks exactly, but something like that, sure. This invention here is not to be denied in any way. These are some very important things that he's done, and it's a romantic idea like burning his paintings, but I have to believe that this is an honest situation. Nobody's going to burn something for a career. You'd see through it or something like that.

Wegman is another. Wegman's had some very interesting photographs and stuff, still does. But the dog theme obviously becomes a career thing. Baldessari is





not going to continue to put red and green dots on photographs; he's already somewhere else. Whereas what Wegman does is simply refine the idea of humor, which gets kind of darker and darker the more you see of it. It's an interesting thing. But still, the dog has got to be in there or else you're not so likely to buy it. If it's a cat, maybe. But if it loses the animal thing--I'm joking, kind of--then you're back to concept art without a dog. I don't know what my point is there, but I wanted to--

Before I forget, the thing about San Francisco and the F/64 group preceded anything I think that would have happened in Los Angeles. The only person during that time period who would have stood out as a photographer would be William Mortensen, who is kind of nuts.

LEHMER: What kind of work did William Mortensen do?

HEINECKEN: Well, Mortensen did basically metaphoric or historic setups using women--and usually young women, and usually nude or half-clothed--like sex stuff. But the other one-- I can't think of his name. Graham Howe did an exhibition and a catalog of this guy's, a very formal advertising photographer from Los Angeles. At the same time that you've got Mortensen in Laguna [Beach] doing this, you've got this other guy, Paul Outerbridge, doing the opposite. Max Yavno would be another person that-- At the time no one knew anything about him, but obviously he



was photographing in Los Angeles during that time doing documentary work. And then [Edmund] Teske was here. But Teske was, whatever he is, not someone that you'd look to outside of a very small circle of people as a force, but he was important because his work was manipulated and expressive. There's no nature here. That's the two things I'm trying to get at, though. There was no culture here like there was a culture in San Francisco during this time period.

LEHMER: What do you mean by culture? There's a photographic patronage or?

HEINECKEN: Well, not just that. What does Los Angeles have besides the entertainment industry? If you think back to the twenties and thirties when some of this starts, there's nobody going to be doing photographs. It's the movies, it's the entertainment business, it's the glitz, and it's still that way. That's why San Francisco is like it is. I mean, they had a symphony before we had outhouses down here. [laughs] It's true. This city didn't exist until after World War II. It did not exist as a city. I mean, it did, but it was nothing. If MOCA wasn't here you wouldn't have anything in this city. The County Museum isn't doing a hell of a lot, and the galleries are basically sedate. I don't know whether the music and theater are very good, but I don't think so



compared to New York or Chicago or San Francisco. We have an industry of television and film, and it's wonderful. It gives a lot of people work. But there could never have been an F/64 situation here. What would you photograph? I mean, you've got an ocean, but you've got no seaweed. It's just that that's a different place.

There were four or five people here in Los Angeles that I'm trying to remember, but very few. Mortensen and Ansel Adams did a series of arguments back and forth in *Camera Life* or some early-- Ansel Adams was actually arguing with this guy in print about what he really should be doing. Mortensen was saying, "You asshole. This is what I'm doing, and this is what you should be doing." It was nuts. I'm trying to say that Los Angeles developed along lines that are completely different. It's no surprise that you have people like [Garry] Winogrand or [Lee] Friedlander using the city basically as their subject matter. Well, there's no city here. There's a city in Chicago, a city with a few people--Danny Lyon, whoever--doing stuff like that. A city and its environment produces certain kinds of things. If there's nothing here except entertainment, then I think it's logical that L.A. would be a place where you'd start screwing around with regular photographs. That's a focus here, because there is no beautiful landscape here,



really, and no drama, no clouds.

LEHMER: It's not a matter of whether there's a beautiful landscape here or not. You can certainly see the beauty in the desert or in the ocean. There's a painting school that--

HEINECKEN: Yeah, I know. But Yosemite [National Park] is not here.

LEHMER: Well, yeah. But Yosemite isn't in San Francisco, either. What you do see here as the prevailing strength is the creating of a fantasy or the creating in film or in a commercial, a very powerful, dominant financial business. Everybody's life is influenced by this because of all the people who work for the industry. But it's creating-- What was the term we used earlier about photography? It's about the people who built their work in the studio. We were talking about JoAnn Callis, John Divola. I think of Eileen Cowin, you, Baldessari--

HEINECKEN: Well, not me. I don't use photographs that way. All those people are making those photographs.

LEHMER: Well, they're making them, but the unity that I see is that you're not dealing with the reality of the landscape or the idea of "Let's take a picture of Aunt Ruth so that we can remember her." You're not satisfied with that. What I mean by the studio is that you're taking ideas and interpreting them, creating new or





different ideas that are your own ideas, your own interpretations of what's there. You may be using existing imagery that people see in public places, but it's all remanufactured--like stories are remanufactured in this town. I mean, that's the one thing that I think of as so dominant. It's not necessarily that there is a beauty here but that there's something else that--

HEINECKEN: Well, maybe it's not the dominant factor here, but--

LEHMER: So I find that thread of unity interesting, and that these galleries are responding to the work that's being produced. I guess a question that I have for you is, these galleries were not necessarily bringing work from the East Coast out here as much as they were showing local work?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. That's true during this time period, with the exception of the few exhibitions that were done through the Grunwald, which were national exhibitions.

LEHMER: With a sense of historic context or--?

HEINECKEN: Yeah, and trying simply to show a range of material which would include all of the ways in which photography is used to make art, including the straight photograph.

People have always tried to make a case for this, and I think in a certain way it can be done with painting.



There's also something in Los Angeles that produced, and I think it still does to an extent, a kind of-- Someone [Billy Al Bengston] coined it "fetish finish" or something like that, which would be epitomized by-- But there's a slick quality to a lot of Los Angeles art, while there's no angst necessarily. I mean, certainly there is some, but there's a kind of idea here that-- Like Robert Irwin. You couldn't get anything cooler than that, and yet it's absolutely mind-boggling. I don't think that that would have happened-- I'm not going to say it's the light in L.A. or some crazy thing like that. There's just something about the organization of material which is possible in a physical climate like this. The shine. I read something not too long ago that the only place where the idea of modifying automobiles starts is in L.A. This still doesn't happen in San Francisco. Why would you do it, you know? So there's something about a climate--I mean the physical and intellectual and whatever--that this city has which allows it to be particularly interesting. It's not always the best, but it's particularly kind of wild.

LEHMER: There's a freedom.

HEINECKEN: Billy Al Bengston was the painter I was trying to think of about the "fetish finish." It was Larry Bell, and it was just kind of really slick stuff, which is just



gorgeous but without any problems, you know? Where is the problem here? Ed [Edward] Ruscha is very interesting in this time period, also, with the books and stuff.

LEHMER: And he also preceded Baldessari's work.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, I guess. I'm not sure.

LEHMER: I mean, I think of that sequence of Sunset Boulevard--

HEINECKEN: But he didn't make all of those photographs. These are his ideas, and I don't know-- I shouldn't say that without knowing more, but I know he didn't photograph the gas stations. He might have done some, but he had people do those things. He didn't walk Sunset Strip doing that by himself. But of course, it is his idea, his vision.

LEHMER: That brings us to another point that's important that I have seen here, and that is people are trying to work on a stronger contextual basis and are less concerned about the execution of craft. Your own curriculum dealt with the exploration of process without being wedded to craft to have the freedom, the fluidity of this environment, so that we don't have the baggage of those heavy museums in New York.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, that's right.

LEHMER: Robert Loescher comes out here. I pick him up at the airport here. He's an art historian and the chair of



the art history program at the Art Institute of Chicago. I pick him up, and we're driving down one of the L.A. freeways, and he says, "It's just great to be here. It's an incredible breath of fresh air. I live in Chicago, I was just in New York, and there's nothing like L.A." I mean, it's just like it's wide open. There's a freedom, a brightness here. That angst that you were talking about-- I don't know. I used to talk about coming to the West Coast. There was like a whole f-stop of enlightenment or enthusiasm.

HEINECKEN: I think for photography but also for films and all sorts of media things--

LEHMER: Now, what we're trying to do is to struggle with the redefinition of--

HEINECKEN: Well, we know it's different. I've lived here all my life, and it is different. I think it's a very wonderful place to live, but it's not a city, really. It was never a city. It's a little bit of a city downtown there. You get a sense that that's where it started.

LEHMER: Yeah, if you're talking about tall buildings and--

HEINECKEN: Well, and a subway system, a train system, a bus system, libraries-- It doesn't have those things. There was no "city" here until World War II. It was a bunch of loosely organized land grants that they stole





from the Mexicans. The history of Beverly Glen I just was reading the other day. Until 1940 this place was wilderness, and it still didn't have any houses until after World War II. Laurel Canyon, Bel Air all the same. Everything. Every canyon here was a canyon until the war, when people started coming out here. They needed the houses or whatever. It's a weird place that way. Detroit-- No cities grow that way. Manhattan is on this island. That's it. It can't go anywhere else. In Chicago it's the Loop. That's where all the buildings are; that's where all the action is. Downtown L.A., you can't find a thing down there. It's all on Rodeo Drive. Anyway, that's neither here nor there. But it's a very interesting place, I think.

LEHMER: It's hard to have an institution that isn't based on a physical location. I'm thinking of one of the frustrations with LACPS. Maybe it's a positive thing, in a sense, that they're infiltrated throughout the community and using a darkroom here, an exhibition space there, but also it's an Achilles' heel that it doesn't have a physical location. In this town it's hard to just congregate at the bistro.

HEINECKEN: Well, the mission--whatever that was--of photography is over at this point. It's not a good "over," it's just over. You have the galleries, you have



the museums, you have collectors, you have all of the things that make the thing work, but it's a very recent development compared to the other cities. My guess is it will never be the kind of cosmopolitan situation that Chicago or New York is. It just can't be. You can't buy that culture. You can't buy that history. It's a wonderfully sleepy place, apparently.

LEHMER: But there's good work that has been produced here.

HEINECKEN: Oh, absolutely. I think it's an ideal place for artists. There is no school of thought here that you have to think about. And although I'm sorry to say it's over, you don't need LACPS anymore--like you don't need SPE--except to allow it to organically change its concept or its philosophical position relative to the medium. That's important. That's what SPE does, that's what LACPS does. But it's not Angel Eye or Ohio Silver trying to make the public aware that there's an artform here that you're not looking at or you're not using somehow. That's over. That's all here now. Pace[Wildenstein] and Gagosian [Gallery] bring their galleries to Beverly Hills, that's a big thing. There are millions of dollars being pumped into the premise that there is movie and entertainment money in L.A., and it's more comfortable for these people to buy their art here if they can get the



same art here they can get in New York without going to New York. That's their premise. I don't know whether that will work. We'll find out.

LEHMER: I was going to say that what I've seen in the last five or ten years at the most has been galleries from New York that are opening up their satellites in Los Angeles. I don't know if I'm correct on this, but it seems to me that there's a stronger connection between New York galleries and Los Angeles than there would be with other communities.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. Well, that's where the money is. I mean, a museum isn't going to produce money, like L.A. County or MOCA. They're not to do that. It's just the dealers. You can buy paintings and donate it to a museum and get the write-off, but those collections are just kind of thin things. They're somebody's taste. Maybe collectively they make up a picture of art. I'm just saying that those galleries move here for a couple of reasons. It's not because they think it's an interesting place or the real estate is good; it's because the money is here. The idea is to woo the people with the money to not go to New York but bring those galleries--those two in particular, and maybe there will be more--and put them in Beverly Hills, where the money is.

LEHMER: But this town isn't limited to having to put it



in Beverly Hills. I don't think--

HEINECKEN: That's where the money is.

LEHMER: Well, the money is in all of Southern California. There's a lot of money in Santa Monica.

HEINECKEN: No, nobody lives in Santa Monica--I mean, nobody that could live in Beverly Hills and Bel Air.

LEHMER: Yeah, but people love their cars. They may live in Beverly Hills, but they're certainly going to eat in Santa Monica and patronize La Brea [Avenue] or--

HEINECKEN: Well, La Brea, yeah.

LEHMER: But I think it can happen, whether it's Colorado Avenue in Santa Monica or La Brea. And it used to be La Cienega Boulevard.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I see your point. You're right, there are definitely active exhibition spaces and dealers here, very much so. What I'm trying to say is maybe you've got five galleries in New York that are the galleries, and at the same time two of them open satellite galleries here. Like one would be [Leo] Castelli--although that's dispersed now--and maybe there are two or three others that could have done that. But none of them have the money that these people have. I think it's a very interesting experiment with them, that's all, but it's a millions of dollars experiment, right? Actually, you can get real estate on Wilshire Boulevard--if my information





is correct--in Beverly Hills for about a third of what you can get it anywhere else in the country. All those buildings are empty on Wilshire Boulevard. That's why they can go there. It's cheap. There are good leases. It's still a lot of money.

LEHMER: Yeah. It's a strange economy that I don't understand.

There are two things I wanted to try to get over with today, and I don't know if we're going to make it. We mentioned the galleries. Can you think back on, in light of what we've been talking about this morning, what kind of work they tried to show? Where were their interests? We'll start with Angel Eye. What kind of work can you think of that they found interesting or important to promote, to push?

HEINECKEN: I don't know. I don't think there would have been a--

LEHMER: Well, they made choices.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I think business people, or those pretending to be business people, would make those choices based on what they think they can move, if it's a dealer, or what reflects the interest of the owner, which would have to be eclectic at that point. It wouldn't be a photography gallery-- It wouldn't make sense if you only showed documentary photographs or only manipulated



photographs or only color photographs. It's got to be a kind of palette of stuff that can appeal to this group and that group so that the collectors aren't exposed only to a certain kind of thing. It's important that they're exposed to things that are contemporary. All of these styles, if we can call them that, coexist still.

There isn't a photo gallery or an art gallery, I don't think, that would be stylistically based on a certain kind of idea. Fahey/Klein Gallery comes closest to something in this regard, which I worked with for years. I was probably the exception to most of what he showed. He has a clientele in mind. He's a very good, personable, smart, energetic, compassionate person about who his clientele is. That's why he's still there. He knows that there's a mystique. People who are in the entertainment business like to see photographs of the entertainment business in a serious way. That's what they buy generally. That's why that gallery is the way it is. He will show you newer, younger work--he has a premise to do that--but his business is in a certain kind of picture.

LEHMER: Would you say that's true with other galleries, like Jan Kesner [Gallery]?

HEINECKEN: I don't know her situation as well as I do Fahey. She seems to have an idea that the downstairs will always be something contemporary with unknown young



artists, while the upstairs is where you would really sell the stuff with artists like Eugene Smith and Ansel Adams or whoever you've got up there. So it's at least a place where you'll see younger people or people you haven't seen before. But if you notice, you'll go in there, and the upstairs is going to be a different thing, and that's for the collector.

The interesting person is [G. Ray] Hawkins [Gallery], but I just don't go there anymore. It's not interesting to me. He's got the longest tenure, really, in this city as a going gallery. He's had--what?--three or four locations? He keeps moving up. He happens to have a lot of money to begin with--or his wife did--which is not a bad thing. I just haven't followed his gallery in the last ten years. Of course, when I'm going back and forth to Chicago for twenty years, I miss a lot of stuff here. I'm not really as filled in as I should be or could be about it.

LEHMER: Now, let's back up to the Camerawork Gallery. What were its objectives? It made some major jumps from Costa Mesa to Corona del Mar to the Bay Area--

HEINECKEN: That's a tough question. I can't remember a lot of shows there. I do know that whenever they had an opening you would drive down to Costa Mesa. It was a long drive, but it was worth going to see. I can't go much



beyond that, but John Upton would know a lot about the history of that. I think it was eclectic stuff.

LEHMER: Okay. We're at the end of the tape here. What I want to do is to give us a lead into the next time. I really like where we went this time as far as getting into the personal work of the individual people that actually created the climate. If we can back out a little bit next time and talk about George Eastman House, Museum of Modern Art, Art Institute of Chicago, San Francisco Museum [of Art], and just touch briefly on--

HEINECKEN: One of the things that I wanted to mention-- I'll say it now so you can remember it--when we were discussing different kinds of photographs, there were at least a dozen shows during, let's say, a ten- or fifteen-year period-- The Museum of Modern Art--and this is more recent--does *Mirrors and Windows*. John Upton did an exhibition here of Minor White, Robert Cumming, and me, and the title reflects those three. I forget what the title is. But it's--and all institutions would have this--an idea where you're as a museum trying to explain to the public what it is that might be interesting about this. John's show was excellent, because there were three completely different approaches to this. Szarkowski's thing is much more general; it's either a mirror or a window. It's not saying much beyond that. But as you





look through it and you read his text, this is the first time in his professional career that he's paid any attention at all to this premise that, yes, there are another 50 percent of photographs out there that have nothing to do with his taste, nothing to do with his description of what makes a good photograph. It's an acknowledgement that, "Yes, at this time, at this late point in my career, I'm going to do this exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art."



TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE

MAY 11, 1996

LEHMER: Earlier we touched on it, and today I wanted to see if we could clarify what some of the major shows were in the sixties and maybe some of those museums that you were saying were collecting photography. You had mentioned last time that they were trying to educate the public to what might be interesting. The museums were taking on that role, which I guess they always do, to try to explain themselves or to explain what they think is important.

HEINECKEN: Right.

LEHMER: We've got the Museum of Modern Art with John Szarkowski. Some of the major shows-- *The Family of Man* is, of course, one that I think of as a starter, and that was in the late forties? Early fifties?

HEINECKEN: I would guess around '50 I'm not sure.

LEHMER: I'm drawing a blank on some of the more recent shows. Can you think of any major shows that were important in the sixties or seventies up to--? Then, of course, there was one of the finales for John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows*.

HEINECKEN: Well, it wasn't really a finale. But it was certainly important for him to do that show, because it



was--which I think we talked about a little bit--the first time, really, that he was willing to acknowledge that there was this other whole set of pictorial circumstances in photography or in using photography. I mean, they were buying things a little bit and stuff like that. It wasn't that they weren't aware or that he wasn't aware of the importance of it. But there was never a full-blown exhibition like this with a book and the whole explanation of the difference between documentary or so-called straight photography as opposed to other manipulated works. He was very smart in terms of this mirrors-windows thing. This is a very clear way--it's a catchy title--of suggesting a view outside as opposed to inside or something interior. And it traveled a lot.

LEHMER: A personal exploration versus--

HEINECKEN: Yeah. A kind of witnessing.

LEHMER: A witnessing. I have heard it said--tell me if this is right or not--that it was kind of a Robert Frank camp versus a Minor White camp. It's not really-- Camp has a bad definition in my mouth. It's more of a direction. I don't know if you agree with that or not. What do you think?

HEINECKEN: Well, Minor White in all of this-- We should talk a little bit about when he was at--

LEHMER: San Francisco [Art Institute]?



HEINECKEN: No.

LEHMER: RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology]?

HEINECKEN: MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] he finally ended up at--

LEHMER: Oh, that's right.

HEINECKEN: --and curated a series of exhibitions, in which he corresponded with all the people that he knew so that their photographic work would be in line with whatever the theme of this particular show would be. There were, I think, four of them, something like that. One, I remember, was *Be-ing without Clothes*, which was about that subject.

So what I'm getting at is that it's not just, let's say, the distinction between the mirror and the window. Because within the window you would have someone like Robert Frank, who was absolutely a witness to something, as opposed to Minor White, who would be the poetic or spiritual side of that. There was an aesthetic being proposed by him that was neither, let's say, strictly a window nor a mirror or that kind of distinction, but it was spiritual. It was personal and basically formal pictures. Basically it's based on what I would call poetic decisions or distinctions of form. It's what the picture looks like, how well it's printed, how well it's presented, how it's sequenced, and all of those things





which get deeper into-- Well, not deeper into, but broadens the concept of what might be a straight photograph. Because at that point you begin to have people setting up in the studio as opposed to outside or wherever, but still holding to the tenets of whatever the camera sees is what you're going to use. You're not going to screw with it after that or put it with anything else. On one level he's within a certain community of aesthetes or something like that. He was very much as important as John Szarkowski was or anybody else, Nathan [Lyons]. It was a smaller, more-- I think spiritual is the word I want here. And of course, he was gay and had workshops that people like [Carl] Chiarenza and [Paul] Caponigro and the guy that's in New Mexico now--

LEHMER: Not Frederick Sommer?

HEINECKEN: No. I'll think of it later. [Walter Chapell] But anyway, these were people in school or just out of school who would actually go to study with Minor White and in some cases live in his big house in Boston. If you went there, you really lived that life, which was like a religious or spiritual life, with the resulting pictures being evidence of that somehow. He's a very complicated person with very complicated ideas. His exhibitions were important, as well, to major museums, because he would do it, I guess, through the aegis of MIT or wherever he



happened to be, but it would be his. He's curating and making all the choices. I didn't know him really well, although good friends of mine like Carl or Caponigro were people who came directly out of his way of thinking and then broke with it, obviously. That's where they got started, really, was this-- I can't even describe it. You know, I keep saying "spiritual." That's as close as I think I can get to it.

We did talk about *Persistence of Vision*, which I thought was the first exhibition to really make these distinctions about--

LEHMER: And that was Nathan Lyons?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. He first did *Toward a Social Landscape*, and then he did *Persistence of Vision*. And the third one was supposed to be something--I don't know what the title was he had for it--but it didn't get produced, I think because of his leaving the [George] Eastman House [International Museum of Photography and Film]. The third show was to have Carl in it, and Caponigro would have been in it. There would have been five people like that, again, who were not seeing it as social landscapes, certainly, and not manipulating it like *Persistence of Vision*, but poetic. That exhibition didn't get made. Certainly his premise was that those were the three distinctions, as opposed to Szarkowski's two.



Get that book [Heinecken exhibition catalog] open and let's look at these dates, because I can't remember my chronology there. I mean, there are certainly hundreds of exhibitions during this time period. Okay, here's from 1960 to 1980--that's when this book stops. You've got--what?--twenty-five one-person exhibitions, which is a lot. I mean, it's only twenty years, really, which I'm simply pointing that out because it wasn't just me that would have that number. Most of the people--like Carl or whoever--would have the same number of one-person exhibitions, which just shows you the vitality or the interest that there was in the medium.

Then if you go to the group exhibitions, it's the same pattern. I mean, there's just hundreds. I was probably in a high percentage of them, but certainly I wasn't in all of them. There were hundreds of them during this time period all over. You saw this show, for instance, in 1966. You said *Persistence of Vision*.

LEHMER: That's right.

HEINECKEN: Which was a very important exhibition.

LEHMER: That was my introduction to photography in an exhibition.

HEINECKEN: Here's another one. This was *Photography for Collectors*, Museum of Modern Art--that's '67--which was the first time that that museum put together an exhibition



and ran through the gamut of things that they had collected. Their collection was mostly along the straight photography idea. Peter Bunnell was involved in that. He was an intern with the museum at that point, and he wrote a very interesting text about-- Well, there was another show called *Photography as Printmaking*. These were both-- Bunnell was connected to both of these--broadening the appeal of the medium to the public. There were by that time--certainly not a lot--private collectors. They are important not to just the museums because of the feedback or the gifts that they would give eventually, but to the dealers who were beginning to show up, especially in New York.

I'll just glance at something here. Well, here's the date of the first show that we did at UCLA, *Contemporary Photography*, that's '68. Here's the other show I was talking about, *Photography as Printmaking*, 1968. This is the one that Bunnell did. All of these are important, not only because of the subject or what was being shown, but for the sites, the venues. In this case places like UCLA, which people know about, or the Museum of Modern Art, which people know about definitely. Most of these, on the other hand, are just small places, some university.

LEHMER: That indicates that there was a grassroots interest in the potential of that medium.





HEINECKEN: Yeah, absolutely. It was maybe not at this stage. But certainly when you get into the seventies, things like SPE [Society for Photographic Education] happen. It's the medium that is new, fresh. The ideas are not pinned down. The schools of thought are not pinned down yet. So people like these curators are making this up as they go along, which is, of course, what happens. It was a very exciting time period not only for the artists involved in it but for the public.

Here's another show, *Vision and Expression*, which Nathan put together. It was a large exhibition that traveled, I think, maybe six or seven different places all over the country. Of course, exposure outside of the East Coast and New York was very important at that time.

LEHMER: I remember that, too. Big catalog.

HEINECKEN: In 1970 here's an exhibition I was in in England at Exeter University. So it would be interesting-- We don't need to worry about this. At the same time these things in Europe start showing up, and later in Japan. France had the largest collection of photographs in the world at that time, because their laws were that everybody who made a photograph and sold it had to give them a copy. But they had no sense of what it was. It was just a giant archive which they began then to sort out and distribute and exhibit. About the same time



all of the interest in European history of photography became exposed. Places like [Museum] Folkwang in Essen, Germany--a guy named Otto Steinert ran that--had all the Bauhaus stuff, all the [László] Moholy-Nagy, all of the dada photographs that he had collected. Those were being shown. Books were being put out not so much about the current European photography, because at that point it wasn't being taught in the schools like it was here. It wasn't being collected as it was here. The history of European photography is very rich in terms of not only the reportage kinds of situations that developed-- The photo-journalism in Europe was very highly developed, but the art thing was not. But the history was. And of course, that all changed, too.

LEHMER: Were you in any exhibitions by the historians who felt that you were a good example?

HEINECKEN: Not at that date, no. I did go when I was in Europe to visit this guy, Otto Steinert, and spent three days there with him looking at all the material that he had. It was mostly from dada and surrealism and Bauhaus stuff, which was very interesting to see. I never would have seen that in the United States. It wasn't here.

Then in 1970 is *Photography into Sculpture*, which came from the Museum of Modern Art, curated by Peter Bunnell. That obviously makes another distinction, which



is that it's three-dimensional or it's in space. It's not a flat print like we're accustomed to. That also traveled, I think, to four or five different sites. There was no catalog for it, which was unfortunate, because it was--

LEHMER: What work of yours was in that? The blocks?

HEINECKEN: The blocks and kinds of stacks of things. I had pieces that were three-dimensional which were made out of transparencies that you looked through to other--

LEHMER: Oh, right.

HEINECKEN: Things like that.

LEHMER: They were like kodaliths or something?

HEINECKEN: I can't remember. There were four or five pieces in there. The interesting thing about it was that he went all over the country for a year and a half looking at stuff and getting this idea pinned down. When he got through it, I think probably 70 percent of the people involved in it were young people, and they were from the West Coast. A lot of them were from UCLA, which was interesting.

LEHMER: Can you think of any names? I mean, I'm sure there's somebody who's going to be overlooked.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, Jerry McMillan was in it. Ellen Brooks had a kind of environmental piece. Darryl [Curran], I think, was in it. I can't think of this guy's name--



LEHMER: Jerry McMillan, did he do the sculptures that looked like they were brown bags?

HEINECKEN: Yeah, brown bags, and then other material which actually used photographs etched in metal which were three-dimensional coils and things like that.

He was very instrumental. He was very inventive and a big part of that scene in Los Angeles. There were many more artists involved that I can't think of. At any rate, UCLA was very well represented. [tape recorder off]

Robert Brown was another guy. He was in Los Angeles and San Francisco, sort of back and forth. He was one of the first people to do a piece in an environmental sense, that is to say a room in an existing situation. He had all kinds of stuff in there.

Peter and I always regretted very much that they didn't have money to do a catalog of this work, because they got seen a lot. As you know, a catalog is seen by more people, and it helps you actually establish something. The show was reviewed in a lot of places in magazine articles and things like that, but there was no catalog. And no slide set, I remember. I think he was going to make a slide set of everything and couldn't get the money to do that either.

LEHMER: Does he have slides of that show, I wonder?





HEINECKEN: Oh, I'm sure he does, yeah.

LEHMER: It would be nice to get them dup[licat]ed now.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. But, see, now if we wanted to find out who was in the show we can't. We'd just have to start guessing at it, which is--

LEHMER: Hopefully he'd have a record of that, though. Well, there would be Peter [Bunnell] to connect to that. That sounds like an important--

HEINECKEN: Oh, yeah. It was very-- This guy Bob Brown, as I said, I think as far as I can see started the idea of what we think of now as installation work. Ellen Brooks also had this kind of a room of these things. I think the piece I did of the television and the chair in this room-- No, I guess that was later. I can't date that exactly.

LEHMER: That's right, I remember that. I saw that in a faculty exhibition at the Wight [Art] Gallery. It had come down from Seattle.

HEINECKEN: No, that's a different room.

LEHMER: Oh, okay.

HEINECKEN: That was also an installation, but this was a room which I did at, I guess, the Pasadena Art Museum. It had a television set with a transparency inside of it of this nude figure, so that whatever was on television simply became the interior of that figure. There was a magazine that you were supposed to look at and a mask that



you were supposed to put on and a chair with plastic flowers all in this five-[foot]-by-seven-foot room.

LEHMER: All right. I have a question to interject at this point. You were pushing the boundaries in various directions away from the traditional with your work. My first question is, why did you feel the need to move beyond the traditional, straight photograph?

HEINECKEN: Well, first of all, I think I was not trained in it. I mean, I was teaching it, and I knew enough about it to make distinctions and judgments, but it was never anything that I was involved in directly. So there would be no reason for me to not follow whatever intuitive decisions would be made about the medium and how I would use it.

LEHMER: Which was to build--

HEINECKEN: Well, it was to manipulate it, including three-dimensional things, including scale, including relationships from unit to unit, and superimposition, and negative images. All of these things are outside, so to speak, of the tradition, of the history, and of the current practice at that time. But it's not like sitting down and saying, "Well, I'm going to do this. This is my idea." It sort of evolves.

The way I got into it originally, which I think we discussed, is I was interested to be able to incorporate



photographic images into printmaking processes--etching, lithography, whatever--which at that time was not being done very much. [Robert] Rauschenberg was the only person I knew who had gone to lithography and silkscreening, and [Andy] Warhol to some extent. For myself, after a certain period, it was to deny the small scale, deny the camera per se, and go to raw material taken from other sources, magazines, or whatever, to deal more or less with superimposition, with negative images, with manipulated images as opposed to a conventional photograph.

LEHMER: Now, one thing that you did--

HEINECKEN: And that spirit, as we've discussed, began to work not only in the undergraduate courses that I taught, because I would always encourage some other approach to it, but in the graduate program at UCLA, which became a place where you could go to study if you were interested in that kind of extension. I forgot the question. Did I answer it?

LEHMER: Yeah. To extend that, one of the first images in this book of yours [Heinecken] was *Venice Alley*. It's like a montage of information.

HEINECKEN: Well, it's actually made from one photograph, but it's been transferred to-- It's made as an etching, so it drops out most of the intermediate tones and isolates the figure and so on into basically two values with some



variation.

LEHMER: Okay, so it's a manipulation.

HEINECKEN: I must have made the photograph from-- Maybe I copied it or something, I don't know. It starts out as a conventional picture, but that's not what was shown. It was the etchings.

LEHMER: Right.

HEINECKEN: I made large ones. I had one here last week about four [feet] by three feet or something like that. Scale has always been one of the things that-- You know, you always think of the eight [inch] by ten [inch] and you always think of it as flat. We changed that. We always thought of it as-- The ideal would be if the value or the-- what's the Ansel Adams thing?--zone system. All these tones had to be represented. We rejected that.

LEHMER: Anytime somebody put a rule down, you were--

HEINECKEN: I'll go back to my first answer, which is that I wasn't trained in all these things, so I wouldn't know the zone system today from anything. I wouldn't know what to do. That's why I use you. [laughs] [tape recorder off] It's not that I don't want to do it or I don't have time to do it. I don't know how to do it, and I don't want to learn how to do it. It's the same with the computer. I don't want to learn how to do the computer. It would take me too long. It's too much work.





I think what interested me about the photograms is that whenever you photograph something normally, you always reduce the scale tremendously. You reduce a landscape down to eight [inches] by ten [inches]. Or even if it's a bigger print, you're changing the scale tremendously. I got caught up somehow in the idea that the scale should always be what it is. So the photograms of the magazine pages, the TV dinners--I don't know what else--are based on the premise that it's not going to be reduced. It's going to be reproduced photographically somehow but not reduced. So the photogram is ideal for that, because whatever the size is, that's the size you get.

LEHMER: Right. I want you to explain one of the first works after the blocks, which was at the Sheldon [Art Museum]. There is a body of work that probably to this day is very close to me for various reasons, and that is *Are You Rea*. How did you conceive of that? How did that come about?

HEINECKEN: I'm trying to think a moment here. This begins, I think, in 1964 and runs through 1967 or something like that. I don't know how I got started on that, actually.

LEHMER: Well, one thing I think of is that you read a lot. I would imagine that you were always looking at



magazines, and any time you lift the page of a magazine you're given a clue as to what's on the next page if the light shines through.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, well, you know it's there intellectually or whatever.

LEHMER: I was wondering if there was that certain image that you saw by accident that was--

HEINECKEN: The only thing I remember-- And I remember it because I've used this to answer the question. It's not like "This is why I started it, this is what I saw," but two events were important in this. One, the real thing that I remember was seeing this Kurt Schwitters collage at some exhibition, I think at UCLA, where he had done a collage of scraps of papers and whatever little, tiny, beautiful things. And Joseph Cornell also. But in the Schwitters thing, I'm looking at it, and it has a theater ticket--like a ticket stub you would get--as part of the collage, but whatever glue he used to put that down with, you saw the backside of the thing. It was typography also, but you couldn't quite see it, because it wasn't transparent. The glue, as you know, just makes that paper more soluble. So I saw it as a very interesting kind of thing, but obviously he didn't intend that and when he glued that down it wasn't transparent; it's changed as it's aged. It was striking to me. I wouldn't say that I



went home and started doing that or something, but I remember that.

And then this is even more romantic. In grade school I remember we had this art teacher--maybe she wasn't an art teacher, but she was the art person--who had us take at Christmas magazine pages that had Christmas trees, presents, and products. You soaked them in hot paraffin, which then dried. I remember the classroom had these kinds of windows at the top of it next to the ceiling all around the room. We placed all these things in the windows so that you could see the front and the back of the page. Her rap on it was--this was '35 or later than that--the commercialization of Christmas. She was teaching us, not only with this project, that Christmas has been commercialized and the religion has gone out of it. I remembered that but not until later when I was doing it. So neither of those instances are anything more than memories of events that, who knows, might still have been in my mind.

But the other reason that this was important, from 1964 through 1967 I went to Europe for a year. Also I had been teaching in other places for one of those years, so I'm traveling a lot. The magazine page, especially when I got to Europe, you just hold it up to the light and you see if it's interesting or not. If it is, you keep it,



and if not, you don't. I was proofing them all on studio proof paper, for which you don't need chemistry or fixing or anything, as you know. You could do that in a hotel room or wherever you are. It's just a simple thing.

Also at that point I began to do transfer pictures where by rubbing off pigments and solvents you can transfer the picture into a collage. I did all of that during that same time period. I remember in Europe we would be in this or that place for a week or two, and I could stop and do those pictures without any darkroom or studio or whatever. You just need a knife and a desk.

LEHMER: In '65 I did a piece, and I never was satisfied with it. It was really crude. When I saw your work-- Maybe that's why I liked Are You Rea, because you said so eloquently what I had been struggling with. I had these two images in my mind. My mind tended to collage things; I tended to blend things in my mind. But I remember the series of Maidenform ads--there were different ones.

HEINECKEN: They passed for sex in that time period.

[laughs]

LEHMER: Well, of course, yeah. I used one picture where this attractive model was lifting her blouse and looking down showing a peekaboo of her bra. Then the other picture I used I pasted on the back of a mobile, which was a picture of President [Lyndon B.] Johnson pulling up his





shirt showing his operation scar. I was never satisfied with that being a mobile that kind of spun.

HEINECKEN: See, I'm thinking superimposition per se cannot exist except in your mind outside of the medium of film and photography. The conventional thinking about this would be that you don't superimpose things because that's not what's real. But it's the only medium in which you can do it, because the matrix is transparent, as is film. You can't do it in video, for instance. It's a property that is based on the materials that are used to make the picture. That interests me very much, because if it's a property that's in the materials that you're using, then you have to use it. You don't just print from it, you put layers of it together.

The Are You Rea thing, I think, is still the most ambitious and fulfilled idea that I've ever had. I mean, it's a very precise way of doing something. It's sequenced in a way which is very interesting. I had the sense that I invented it, and I think I did. This is not something that other people haven't done, but-- I remember when I first met Arthur Siegel, who was a Bauhaus guy. He was very interested in this work, but then he pointed out to me that he had done that in 19-something-or-other. I said, "Well, that's really interesting"-- I became good friends with him--"that's really interesting, Arthur. But



how many did you make?" And he said, "Two." I said, "Well, I'm making thousands of these things and getting it down to twenty-five." And he laughed.

Then also [Edmund] Teske did a piece once that had-- it's one of his really interesting pictures--a postcard, on the back of which is a picture of-- Not a postcard. It's a photograph, I think, of his mother, and on the back of it something was written. He made a photogram of that. But that's the only one that he made. That probably predates when I did this work, but I didn't know that at the time. So anyway, that's a very important piece for all these reasons.

And also the idea of making a portfolio out of-- It was the first portfolio that I made. So it was no longer one picture or an edition of five; I printed five hundred of these things. It was a distribution idea as well as an expressive idea.

LEHMER: If I remember correctly, the portfolio was also something affordable. It was something that Kathy [Kathleen Lehmer] gave me as a gift.

HEINECKEN: I think it cost \$10 or something originally.

LEHMER: It was our first original work of art purchase as a couple. She surprised me with it. It was a real knockout surprise, because it was something that I felt was very personally important to me. And of course, we



were newlyweds and poverty-stricken. It was a very valued piece of material that I liked because it was not only a great idea and I could relate to it personally--maybe a lot of people could, because everybody who's flipped a page of a magazine has a hint of what you executed--but it was accessible. Your ideas were accessible.

HEINECKEN: The particular superimpositions that are involved-- I mean, maybe one out of the five hundred pages that you look at is one that will do what you want it to do. So there's a lot of work involved in this, which doesn't show up necessarily in the twenty-five pictures that are there finally.

LEHMER: That brings me to a question of--

HEINECKEN: In the basement there are two boxes with all of those pages which are not assembled. I printed five hundred, but I didn't make five hundred. I probably made a hundred. So I think one of the things I'm going to do when I do this retrospective is I'm going to hire someone to make all of those and either give them away or try to sell them as mementos for the exhibition. It takes an hour to make the cover and fold--

Another portfolio I did, which I'll mention now because I'll forget it, was called *Just Good Eats for U Diner*, which had photograms of food in it. The first one of the edition--I found this in my records later--was



bought by Joy [Joyce Neimanas] at some SPE meeting for \$38. So that was interesting that she was the first one who bought it.

There's a very interesting-- In the *Recto/Verso* portfolio which you have--

LEHMER: Which is the late eighties.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, '88, I think. Alex [Sweetman] wrote an introduction to go in with the *Recto/Verso* portfolio.

It's a very good text, if you want to look at it, about *Are You Rea*, because he just describes how I showed up at the Center for the Eye workshop in Aspen, Colorado, with this material when he was a student and how struck he was with it, how he had never seen anything like that. He goes into some depth.

LEHMER: You have to make choices. I'm sure part of it is formal, that the two images are superimposed without the information of one image being destroyed by the information of the other image, so that they complement each other or blend properly. Beyond that, I found the subject matter was always striking. It gets back to some of the things that I think about with your work. Some of the strongest things that I relate to is your targeting cultural values similar to Lenny Bruce or George Carlin and their observations and pinpointing the hypocrisies or the inconsistencies of our value system, our culture. I





question whether some of those roots of yours are from what we've talked about very early in this interview, which is your parents, your grandparents--the quest for the Lutheran ministry and the teachings of ethics or values based in a religion. I'm wondering if some of that intensity has been carried over, because that's an important part of your life that can't be ignored. I guess I wasn't surprised a few years ago when I learned of your strong Lutheran background--not that it would be formally or physically related, but there is an ethic that you're targeting in the work. I think *Are You Rea*-- I can think of one in a later series of silkscreens in *Time* magazine where there's this South Vietnamese soldier holding two heads of Viet Cong. Silkscreen over--

HEINECKEN: It's actually just offset lithography, not silkscreen.

LEHMER: Litho over--

HEINECKEN: A magazine page.

LEHMER: A magazine page. But you chose certain pages because there was certain information that you felt was contradictory-- I mean, can you tell us what attracted you in *Are You Rea* and in a lot of the subject matter that you have produced? What did you find intriguing?

HEINECKEN: Well, without going into it a lot, there's a process involved here when you look at a magazine page.



You put it in the window and look at it or put it on a light table and see, I think as you suggested, whether it's just visually-- I mean, do they erase each other? If nothing happens, you discard it. It's a very long, drawn-out process, so that what I would call a visual gestalt happens. Gestalt means, I think, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, something like that, in psychology. But visual gestalt then would mean something that by being superimposed randomly with something is a gestalt phenomenon. It's not just A and B together, it's now C as a result of that. So then if it looks like there's a gestalt in my mind, whatever that is, I'll put it aside or I'll print it later. But the real work--



TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE TWO

MAY 11, 1996

LEHMER: Okay. So you've put it aside--

HEINECKEN: Right. So the real work then becomes what to do with, let's say, fifteen hundred so-called interesting-looking pictures in terms of the gestalt. I know it's going to be a portfolio with roughly twenty-five pictures. Let's say thirty pictures; it can't be more than that because it's just too bulky. So the real work is then getting it down from that huge number to those which seem to be absolutely the most poignant in terms of culture, where the disparity between the front and back is visible in the gestalt somehow so that the text that might be on one side is going to describe something that isn't there. Singularly it's there in superimposition with something else. That work takes a long time to get it down to a reasonable number.

I think--which was fortunate for me--when I had maybe one hundred of these laid out I began to see a pattern that I could describe--for whatever reasons these things showed up--which I designated to be political. That is to say it had not just social but some political ideas there. Another grouping showed up which was of women and children. Another one was what I call "marriage



triangles," where there's a couple, a man and woman, but with another single woman or man, so that there's three people involved in this thing. Another one had to do with cosmetics, because a lot of these things actually come from not fashion magazines but women's magazines, where women obviously are depicted more in them. Out of that came something which certainly wasn't lesbianism, because that's not implied necessarily, but it is of two women, one on the front and one on the back, which are superimposed in what I would consider to be an exotic or erotic or sexual kind of position.

The point is, in discovering that there are five, six, seven groupings in here which are all interesting pictures, that's finally the crux of how it's put together, because it's sequenced in such a way where you look at three or four pictures in a row. I don't identify them this way, but you'll see that they're all a woman and a woman for three pictures. Then suddenly it's got text in it; it's about rioting or something. If you're really smart you can sense the sequencing of the twenty-five pictures as being the content. It's not the pictures, but the order in which they're being revealed to you in terms of social phenomena. Now, I don't think very many people would get to that point. But it allowed me a system by which I can eliminate other things and leave in certain





things which are pertinent to this sequencing or these groupings.

I didn't--and this was a mistake--number the pages, because as soon as someone owns this thing, if it gets out of order then you don't have those groupings so-- They're in there, obviously, but they're not in sequence to show you the three or four. So that was a mistake.

LEHMER: Can you sequence them now? I mean personally?

HEINECKEN: Oh, yeah, sure, more or less. I have one somewhere which is all beat up which tells me how to do that.

LEHMER: I find a relationship between the super-impositions. It's almost something that you observe. It's a very photographic thing in a sense. It's where I find your ideas dovetailing with a straight photographer, because it's still something that's observed that exists.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. You could make the picture by photographing both sides of it and putting them together photographically, but the photogram, of course, does that automatically.

LEHMER: Yeah. But there's something about the purity of the discovery of something that exists.

HEINECKEN: Oh, yeah.

LEHMER: There's an ethic there that is really intriguing. It kind of helps you talk about--



HEINECKEN: Well, see, what you suggest, which is true, is that if you wanted to do this same kind of project you could find two magazine page images on one side and put that with another magazine page, and you could pick them in such a way that they would be extremely dramatic with extremely easier-to-read content and more beautiful. But it's an endless job, and it's conventional.

LEHMER: And you've done that with collages.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I'm just saying it's the realization that-- Also, I could have made the photogram and then counter-printed the photogram to get it back to positive. Then it would look like the image, but these are all negative images.

LEHMER: Why did you choose to leave them in negative rather than to have them positive?

HEINECKEN: Well, I think the first thing is that's what happens. When you print from one thing to another, it's going to reverse tones. You can read what they are, but they're not-- I don't want them to look like them. They're black and white, there's no color, which-- Most of these are in color.

It's interesting. When I came to do the *Recto/Verso* portfolio--I don't know when Cibachrome was introduced, but I had never used it, because I don't use color in that sense--it occurred to me that here was an opportunity to



do a similar project with magazine pages but in positive. Not because I necessarily wanted it to be positive, but prior to that there was no material that you could contact to that would be positive. It would have been-- A color negative and a color negative, as you know, doesn't look very interesting, but the positives do, because you just see it. The pictures are much more obvious, I think, than in Are You Rea. They're much more similar to what you might think of as a magazine page, because it is in color. You recognize it to be fashion ads and things like that. But it's no less striking, I think, in its difference from Are You Rea--which is thirty years or something--and how violent and how sexual these things are in and of themselves. I don't put them into superimposition to make them that way; they're there. It's just nudity and violence. All the stuff that we're interested in is there.

LEHMER: I have two questions. One, you made reference to the term "ready-mades." I find a kinship between photograms and the ready-made idea in that they pre-exist. It's a really eloquent pursuit of perception and observation. What are some of the ready-mades that you can think of that influenced you off the top of your head?

HEINECKEN: The concept of ready-mades, as [Marcel] Duchamp termed them, is probably one of the most important



things to have happened in the history of Western art. Everybody is affected by this phenomenon that he invented. I don't know the full history of how that came to him, but I do know that I liked what he did very much, and I liked who he was as an individual very much. I would probably unconsciously fashion myself after him, because he took nothing seriously but everything seriously. It's a very wonderful frame of mind. As far as intention, what's important about it is that it just breaks down the whole idea of modernist art or art as we understand it as being original and being handmade and being valued that way. Obviously that's what he in this dada spirit was doing. Somehow it caught on, and now we have it. It's just amazing what happened there.

LEHMER: What is the spirit of dada?

HEINECKEN: Well, in this piece and other similar pieces, he's really just saying art is not art, let's say. Art is art when it's in the context of art. So he's saying I'll put this urinal or bicycle wheel in the gallery because that's the context for art. It's a beautiful, bizarre idea--which is the joke, really. His work mostly is not involved in it. These are the very few pieces, finally. What he went on to do, or what he did simultaneously, is much more interesting in the sense that it is handmade. Taking things like the large glass and leaving it out for





a period of time to let whatever happens to it happen is a ready-made concept. But it's not something where you're taking a manufactured item and seeing something in it that's like art and putting it in a gallery. It's a concept that is very important to me, but I don't hold strictly to that. I'm interested in that you see something and you already know what it is, but it's been transformed in some way. It's not by the context of a gallery or an exhibition but by superimposition, making it negative, or altering it in some way. But you still know that it's something which hasn't been invented by me. It's something that they could have found and could go and do if they wanted. Anybody could do this. It's just not difficult to do. But why would you do it? That's the point.

LEHMER: Well, yeah. It's "Why would you do it?" It's not something that is a finely honed skill or craft that you have spent years training yourself to do so that your hand has unique craft ability. But not only is it superimposition, which is another tool, it's the choices that you've made that define you or Duchamp, that define the artist.

HEINECKEN: Well, see, I don't know if this is the right point to say it, but in the case of using magazine pages or magazines per se, there's text involved in these



things. Basically it's an advertising device, just like television. I mean, we get to see television, but we don't get to see it without the advertising. Anytime that you use television, let's say, or printed material, people are aware of the fact that the advertising is paying for it. You're not going to get one without the other in a conventional cultural situation. The material is already sorted out for you in the sense that if you use a magazine or television, you know what it is. You haven't seen the page superimposed, but it's a simple idea.

LEHMER: I always had this thought in my mind when I looked at your work, how many art directors you affected, if any. I tend to want to say to myself that their awareness was heightened by the fact that we have to be careful as to where we place our ads, so that you don't flip the page from a holocaust situation to a perfume ad.

HEINECKEN: There are eight zillion people on the planet, and one person has seen this possibility, so I don't think they're worried too much. It's a job, and it's a very-- Well, art directors-- I don't know the distinctions here, but the stuff that goes into magazines are very high-quality images and ideas. Well, not ideas. They're just stupid ideas, but they're very attractive, as they are on the television commercials. And the reason that you can use those things without a doubt of having people



understand what it is is the key to it. I mean, that's what's interesting to me.

Or a TV dinner. Those were made in the seventies or earlier. Everybody understands what a TV dinner is because you've eaten them all the time. Now you ask a kid, "TV dinner?" and they don't know the term. They know that there's a frozen meal, but it's not a "TV dinner." What's good is you don't have to cook dinner; you heat this thing up and you go watch television. That's why it's called "TV dinner."

LEHMER: I don't know why I make the association, but whenever I see your *TV Dinner* series I think of a movie that was in that same era, which was Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*. There he is, getting off work. It's mid-morning or something like that. It's early. He's been up all night long chasing people all over San Francisco. He goes into this corner grocery store, goes to the freezer case, looks, and then starts grabbing--

HEINECKEN: I remember that, yeah.

LEHMER: --without much choice every TV dinner in a row. He's taking a week's worth of food up to his apartment.

HEINECKEN: Well, during this time period--not that it's important--my wife then, Janet [Storey], was working a three [o'clock] to eleven [o'clock] shift always. I was responsible for dinner, so I think the kids and I probably



ate a couple of hundred thousand of these things.

[laughs] So it's not something that was rare. But we didn't watch TV with it. That was it. Bang, a TV dinner.

LEHMER: So it's something that obviously you're familiar with, which leads me to the next-- I'll make a big quantum leap to a project you did. [tape recorder off] Another project that you did was a grant from Polaroid [Corporation]. Can you describe that?

HEINECKEN: Yeah, but before that I was thinking about Duchamp. There's what I call stylistic identification, which means--and we may have talked about this before--you can look at a work of art and say, "Oh, that's by so-and-so" because of the way it's made.

LEHMER: And not necessarily formally make that identification.

HEINECKEN: Stylistically somehow--I don't know how we differentiate that. But it's not just formally. All of the factors somehow clue you to who made it. This is a very important device or phenomenon in contemporary art merchandising. It's so that you want to own an Ed [Edward] Ruscha painting or whoever it is because of the individual making it. I don't know whether I rejected that necessarily outright, but it's just not an interesting thing for me to sit down and make yet another set of Are You Rea things. Although I could do that, and





people would find it interesting if there were limited quantities available. You can build a stylistic identification around your work for purposes of merchandising. It's clear. I'm not saying it's a bad thing. If you're going to try to make a living as an artist in this culture, you almost have to do that.

LEHMER: Art as commodity.

HEINECKEN: Well, and as stylistically identified. What I would rather have happen, and I think it does happen to some extent even now, would be that you would go into someplace, and you would see something on the wall. You wouldn't know anything about it, but you would say, "Heinecken made that." You'd know it, because no one else would make it. No one else would have that sense of it.

That's not stylistic identification but conceptual.

Duchamp had this, too. You don't have to know it's his work by virtue of stylistic similarities. You know that it's--I think in his case--just that utterly no one else would do it. So it's got to be maybe this guy or that guy. That's a much more important phenomenon for me to strive for rather than looking at it and knowing by its appearance who made it. I'm not disinterested in having people know that I made these things, but I'm not going at it the easiest way to do it. I would be bored doing that. I'm not suggesting that other artists are not bored or are



bored. That's fine.

LEHMER: No, it's just that it's a deeper commitment--

HEINECKEN: In photography I think it's even more interesting. In conventional photography, the most prominent stylistic identification that's possible is subject matter or location. It's like the window idea. It's that a nude figure immediately can be-- Or let's say it's a street scene. You immediately begin to think of a whole set of people--Robert Frank, [Garry] Winogrand, [Lee] Friedlander--who are only distinguishable from one another by connoisseurs, really. They're not identifiable to individuals by style, because the style is pretty much constant: its subject. In Robert Frank's case it's the whole emotional set of the thing. I guess my point was in conventional photography you wouldn't-- You can always identify a [Robert] Mapplethorpe photograph because nobody else is doing it, and they're stylistically similar. They're posed photographs and so on. Or any of the people that we could mention, I don't know. Cindy Sherman doesn't do the same thing all the time, but you know it's her. It's that mind. You can see it. She's interesting that way. She doesn't seem to be just following some road map.

LEHMER: Sometimes I think museums can provide an interesting service. I wouldn't have drawn the parallel



between Edward Weston's work and Mapplethorpe's work, but they did. Maybe it's more on a formal level, because they actually had pieces right next to each other, and you could say, "Wow." It was hard to tell who did which. You could see that there was a great influence. I think part of that is because there is an age, cultural, and conceptual difference between the two, a vast difference.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, but I think I would say that they are formal. They're beautiful pictures. They're rich pictures. I don't know which Weston photographs were placed with which Mapplethorpes, but I would imagine that the most unique pairing would be in formal similarities.

LEHMER: Yeah. They were physically, formally similar in many cases to the point where I did not realize how important Weston must have been to Mapplethorpe. It was just too close.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I always thought Mapplethorpe--I haven't seen a lot of it--was very interesting but very limited in-- I mean, the flower pictures and stuff are very sexual or sensual pictures, but that's different than somebody with a fist up somebody's ass, which is done as if it were a fashion photograph. It's either very clever or just bullshit, I think. I don't know which it is. Obviously it's an interesting thing to look at or an interesting thing to understand. But it gives you--and



this is what troubles me about it--a false sense of understanding of a subculture such as that kind of homosexuality or whatever. It doesn't tell you anything about that. I mean, [Charles] Gatewood and some of those people, this is the real stuff. Now, I'm not saying-- And there's no attempt to make it beautiful. It's like a documentary of a subculture. That's more important than another beautiful picture à la Weston of something that's aberrant in some sense. That's not the right word, but--

LEHMER: There is a frustration that I have where the appeal of one's work is based on the exotic subject matter and the formal beauty with which it's been executed. I can think of different people. For instance, Cathy [Catherine] Opie's work, if you're familiar with her work. The one thing that bothers me about that work is that I don't feel revelation. I don't feel that I understand a culture. And yet I feel that one of the strongest points about Danny Lyon's *The Bikeriders*, as an example, is that I feel that he has allowed me into a culture that I would not have access to. However, there's an exoticness or a hint of that in Cathy Opie's work or Mapplethorpe's work, but I don't really feel that I'm allowed in, where you might begin to feel that in Nan Goldin's work or--

HEINECKEN: Yeah. That's the difference there. I mean, Nan Goldin is happening. They're posing sometimes, but





you do get a sense of the culture or subculture or an age of the people. It's quite wonderful, I think. See, the side of photography which is really bad is that you cannot trying to fool someone--take something that exists, recreate it for the camera, and it's never going to be the same. You're not witnessing it, but you're also not witnessing it as it's happening. It's now in the studio, big camera, lights, twenty people, assistants, whatever.

LEHMER: Irving Penn is the father of that. Well, maybe not the father but--

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah, but Irving Penn is different-- I would say [Richard] Avedon is a better example of-- That thing about Western people or whatever that was was just garbage.

LEHMER: He's taking the exotic and romanticizing it in this highly aestheticized, controlled environment of the studio.

HEINECKEN: Anytime a person involved knows they're being photographed they're going to present themselves in some way that's different. Everybody does it. I mean, we know it. People who don't do that are actors. They have to learn how not to-- You know, they're doing something that is not part of being photographed, and somehow they have to get into that mind-set. They know they're being photographed, but it's not like they're looking at the



camera or screwing it up. Or at least what we finally see is edited down or whatever that is.

LEHMER: Well, let me back up.

HEINECKEN: The property of a photograph that is exactly what doesn't interest me is the witness idea. I'm not even interested in anything that the camera can do. The camera is only a small part of what photography really is for me. The process is important.

LEHMER: Well, that brings me back to something. Probably one of the most important experiences in my education was working--again, I think I've said this before--with John Collier, where we actually dealt with the sequencing and editing of images. An image by itself can be misinterpreted, but I think that when you begin to sequence things--

HEINECKEN: Yeah, but there you have a sociocultural anthropologist who happens to know about photography and uses it, but he's looking at something quite different for quite different reasons than most people would be.

LEHMER: Well, he's not necessarily laying that on the student.

HEINECKEN: No, no. But I mean the reason that he's there teaching students is not because of any other reason except that he's an expert in this field. Or at least his judgments are expert judgments relative to how to do the



photograph, how to put it together, and what its value is supposed to be as honestly and as directly as possible, as opposed to Cathy Opie.

LEHMER: Well, I think that when you put up a series of images he's saying you'd better be damn careful as to how you put them up. Because when you put a second image up, it's beginning to germinate with the first one. That sequence, depending on order, will have a completely different meaning, story, or impact. He would just say you'd better be damn careful about that and be aware of the fact that sequence is a very powerful tool. It's like a gun, you know; you'd better know where you're pointing the damn thing or you'll get hurt.

HEINECKEN: Well, that's--I think we talked about this before--why I feel it's so interesting to relate or important to understand the relationship between photography sequencing and language. It's the sequencing which makes it understandable and poetic at the same time--if it wants to be poetic.

I was just thinking, I made a picture called *Documentary Photogram*, which is an interesting title. It's contradictory, because it can't be a documentary photogram. I think they're of food things or something like that.

The Polaroid thing--



LEHMER: Yeah, let's back up to the Polaroid thing. You received an offer from Polaroid to come out and use this massive twenty-[inch]-by-twenty-four-[inch]-size print film to create images. What subject matter did you choose? Why don't you explain that.

HEINECKEN: Well, I'm trying to think what was the first-- I did it maybe three or four times.

LEHMER: Oh, the ones I'm thinking of are of the food.

HEINECKEN: Okay, that would have been one of the later ones. Let's start with that. What was interesting there is that the camera makes one color positive print. It's like a huge SX-70, basically. You can make another one, but you can't print from it, because it's not a negative that you can use or a transparency of any kind. There's no matrix for it. It's the stuff and then the picture. So that interested me in the sense that I wanted to make color photograms-- What's the date of this in relation to Cibachrome, *Recto/Verso*? It must have been before that. The Polaroid thing predates that idea. What's involved is very interesting, because the camera is also the processing device of this. In other words, when you pull the paper down out of it, the camera stays there. You photograph with it, the paper goes back up into the machine and is processed in the machine. It's all in this unit--some magic. I don't know how this happens.





So to make a photogram of the food, it had to be figured out how to take the food, bring the paper down out of the thing onto the flat surface, and arrange the food on that paper. Later we put down Plexiglas so that it-- But the ones without the Plexiglas are more interesting, because you've got the juices on there and the staining, and the stuff sticks to the paper and all of that. Then you remove the food, run the paper back up into the camera, and process it, which takes only a few minutes or something. Then you can see exactly what you've got. You can rearrange it, you can change the exposure-- Because you have no idea what the exposure should be because of the density of the food. Who knows? So anyway, what this produces is a positive color but a transparent image. It's hard to describe. Light is running through it, so it's showing the silhouette of the food. It makes the background all white so that there's no depth to it at all. It shows you the interior and the basic color of the food. So it was a very interesting use of the camera.

Actually, by the time that I did this work I had used the camera at least twice before, I think, in the Polaroid situation. At this point they began lending the camera out to different institutions, one of which was the School of [the Museum of] Fine Arts, Boston, where I did these pictures. There was no Polaroid guy there-- Or there was.



The guy's name was John Reuter, I think. He doesn't care what you do as long as you don't screw up the machine. But if you went to Polaroid with this idea, no way were they going to have food anywhere near this camera. The technicians would have had to do it. So it was relaxed enough that we could do experiments with it without Polaroid knowing what was going on.

What's interesting about this is the first day, I think, I just did meals--not meals really, but just food laid out to see what it looks like. Some of those are interesting. But at some point--I think I was there three days--I came up with the idea of doing-- You know, it's twenty-four inches, so it's big enough that you can use a lot of food. I decided to do two pieces of it one meal on the left side of the paper and then another meal on the right, so that those two things would be in contrast to one another. One picture is made of food taken from this truck that comes around every day for the students, like a catering truck. It's just pre-made sandwiches and all of that. One side of it is made with that stuff. And then the other side is made from meals that I got from the museum cafeteria, which is a high-class kind of place where you get pasta primavera and all kinds of fine desserts. I put those on the other side of it on the same day during the same lunch period. Then there's a text



below that explains what the foods are--this is written on the print later. It explains that this comes from the Boston museum school lunch wagon, and this comes from the Boston museum patron's cafeteria. They're called *Iconographic Art Lunches*.

LEHMER: Yeah. Of course, the students were on the left and the patrons were on the right. [laughs]

HEINECKEN: Well, probably. I don't know. So it's not just getting through the technical problems of how to use the Polaroid to make this thing, but also then to work through it long enough to realize that the meals themselves are not as interesting as the juxtaposition of the student artists--whose school happens to be associated with the museum which is across the street--with the patrons and what they eat. There's not only a visual dichotomy because the fettucine is beautiful and the hamburger is not so much, but the idea is that the students are in the same context as the collectors but worlds apart in a sense. Those are interesting pictures, I think, and very technically complicated to do or to figure out. But once you know how to do it, it's okay.

Prior to that, I went, I think the first time I went to Boston, to Polaroid's labs to do this stuff. I wanted to do pictures from television tapes that I had made of these newswomen and superimpose them and things like that.



The same day--I think they had three cameras--[Andy] Warhol was there doing something, and some scientific team was also in there doing something. There were separate studios. The point I'm making is that I've got three white-coat guys with me; one of them is running the camera, the others are technicians. I explained what I wanted to do. I don't know what the other people were doing, Warhol and all.

So I said, "We're going to photograph this television set." We needed a certain shutter speed to stop the thing, or maybe we froze it on the television, I don't know.

But anyway, the guy said, "We can't do these pictures."  
And I said, "Why not?"

He said, "Well, the camera is vertical format and the pictures are horizontal format," which means you'd have to use only part of the paper or something like that.

I told him I wanted just to fill the whole thing with this television image. I saw the solution, but I said, "Now, you guys think about this. How can we do this?" I already knew. I'd figured it out by seeing the problem.

"It can't be done," they said.

I said, "Well, you can't turn the camera? It doesn't rotate?"

He said, "No, absolutely not."





I said, "Well, you can't pick up the whole camera?"

By that time they're saying "Maybe you're not appropriate for this. Maybe you're being sassy."

I said, "Turn that television set on its side." This is a Ph.D. guy, you know.

He said, "Well, I don't think we can do that."

I'm saying, "If you can't turn the camera, just turn the television set on its side."

And he said, "Do television sets run when they're on their side?"

I thought, "These guys are just out of control." They didn't want to do it. They just clearly didn't want to do it at all.

So finally we put the television set on its side and it all worked out.

But then we had to do superimpositions, which they had never done. They're not sure what the exposure should be if you're going to do it on top of the other one. I said, "Well, I don't know about this camera, but you usually take the basic exposure and cut it in half." These are technicians, right? I think he said, "I should just cut it in half and make two halves so we'd have the same--? Well, let's see. Where's the book on it?" It was just crazy. Finally we got that done.

One more story about it that-- I had an SX-70, which



is their material, and I wanted to blow that up to as big as it could be on their camera. It got down to, "Well, this is a grant that we're giving out for people to experiment with the camera, and you could do this with any camera. You just photograph with this SX-70 and you make a big picture." I said, "That's not the point here. I want to see exactly what the grain structure of that SX-70 is. I want to see the edge of where the paper doesn't quite fit down onto the image. I want it to be the world's biggest SX-70 picture." And they went, "Well--" Anyway, we finally got that done. It was just a horrible fight between my originality and imagination and this strict use of that camera. I learned something there about technology.

LEHMER: "I learned something about scientists," in a sense.

HEINECKEN: Well, these weren't scientists, but they were highly educated technical people who don't get it.

LEHMER: I think of scientists as people who are dealing with the unknown, as researchers, possibly. There are also scientists who are clinicians and deal only with what has already been--

HEINECKEN: Actually, a real scientist would have seen this immediately and agreed to it. It's an intermediate thing.

I don't know if we have time, but I'm going to tell



this story too, if I can think of it now. What was it?

[tape recorder off] I learned in one of these visits how the forty-[inch]-by-eighty-[inch] camera came to be from [Dr. Edwin H.] Land, who's brilliant and has a very interesting life to go along with all of this. Polaroid is dead broke. Everybody's selling their stock or they're going to sell their stock. They're going to have to close the company down because-- I don't know what phase they're in here or why that happened to them, but it's serious stuff.

So he's meeting with these people who-- I think they said, "Where are you with this forty-[inch]-by-eighty-[inch] camera?"

[Land] said, "Well, we're this far."

And they said, "How long will it take you to get this thing, just a prototype, running on time?"

Land said, "Well, maybe four months or something."

And they said, "We're having a stockholder's meeting in two weeks, and you will have that camera finished."

Land said, "Impossible."

They said, "You guys are all going to be out of work, this company's going to be gone. Two weeks," or some short thing like that.

So they got it done. You could make one picture one time, but they got it done.

Then at the stockholder's meeting they bring in this



painting from the Boston museum. I forget if it was a Rembrandt. Not a Rembrandt but some very well-known, famous painting. Very valuable. He gets them to lend him this painting, brings the painting over, and puts it in front of the stockholders. Then he brings out this forty-[inch]-by-eighty-[inch] print. It's a picture that size, actually. He brings out this print and has everybody come up and look at the difference between these two things. Of course, you can't tell the difference. The frame is included in the photograph. If you touched it you would know the difference, but you can't-- And they said, "This is the future of Polaroid. It's the forty-[inch]-by-eighty-[inch] camera." That saved the company.

It's a wonderful story, I think. But it was obviously to show the common person the value of this. The reason that they chose the museum and this picture was because Land was in the museum one day and he saw a little card that said, "This picture is on loan." The idea was to make this a one-time picture and put it on the wall while the real thing was on loan. To the casual observer it doesn't look like the three-dimensional frame, but it's a high-resolution picture.





TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE ONE

MAY 25, 1996

LEHMER: I wanted to try to get across today some of the exhibitions that I thought were important and talk about the more recent work that might be less known because it's not published in that big book [Heinecken exhibition catalog]. We can go from there. And then I had some overall thoughts, some words that kept coming to me that relate to your work or relate to what people have said about your work. Let's see if there is some response that you might have, like, "Well, people have always said that, but I don't quite agree with that" or whatever. The first thing, to continue from what we were starting to do last week, there was a new series of work in 1978 incorporating written material. Let me back up before that one. I want to hit that, but-- *History Transformed* is the title of a group exhibition in 1975. Who was in that?

HEINECKEN: Where was that?

LEHMER: I want to say that that was the show-- Was it Peter Bunnell who did that? No.

HEINECKEN: The name is familiar, but I can't place it right now

LEHMER: I wish I had that black book. [tape recorder off] *One Eye Opened, One Eye Closed* was in '76. And that



was *Three Photographers Look at the Nude: E.J. Bellocq, Robert Heinecken, and Les Krims*. How did that come about? What did that show consist of? What do you remember about it?

HEINECKEN: Well, it was out of the country, in Canada. That's always interesting. I don't know how this guy, whoever did it, put it together, but I'm sure it came out of an SPE [Society for Photographic Education] meeting-- you know, one of those things where this guy wants to do a show and he ideates it. There was a small catalog, which is probably in the collection somewhere. Bellocq is the guy who photographed the prostitutes in New Orleans and the plates were lost for years. Then [Lee] Friedlander found the plates and made all the prints from them.

LEHMER: *Storyville [Portraits: Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District]*?

HEINECKEN: Yeah. Because Storyville was the district in New Orleans with the prostitutes. Krims would have been at the high point of his visibility with his work with the nude, which was very--

LEHMER: His pancake series?

HEINECKEN: Well, it was that and even before that, not having to do with the nude, the *Deerslayers: [A Limited Edition Folio]* thing. I mean, he was always doing something that was going to upset somebody. No matter



what he did it was wrong for somebody.

Bellocq is not exactly documentary. I mean, these are real prostitutes, but he's--I don't know that he's a real patron of them--inside the group somehow. He's photographing them really as portraits. They're not even sexual, necessarily, but they are kind of. And Krims would be contrasted to that in the sense that these are also set-up situations. He's not photographing anything that he's not controlling, which is different than Bellocq.

I think my work was seen in contrast to both of those things, also in which nothing comes from reality in a sense. I mean, the pictures are constructed from magazine pages or whatever else. I think it was an interesting idea of how do we perceive the female nude body in photographic art. So here's three different views of it: two contemporary, one historical. It's too bad we don't have the catalog to review that. But it was a statement and an interesting exhibition.

The [John] Upton exhibition at California State University, Long Beach [*Minor White, Robert Heinecken, Robert Cumming: The Photograph as Metaphor, Object, and Document of Concept*] also plays into what we've been talking about off and on here, people trying to make an exhibition that in fact instructs people about things. So



myself and Robert Cumming and Minor White all have three different approaches. This Bellocq-Krims thing is three different approaches, something like that. You're expanding what constitutes in people's minds something about sex, women, and nudity into categories that can be studied separately from that vague generalization of things. At that time period there were a lot of exhibitions and writings and things about that, because photography was beginning to not be a thing but a lot of different things.

LEHMER: It reminds me of when I was in [Kalispell] Montana and I ran that art center [Hockaday Center for the Arts] where I tried to get a handle on where the people were in their ideas of what art was and could be, and I would try to expand that. It was a nonprofit community art center, so it wasn't a commercial space. It didn't have to sell Western art, which was so prevalent up there. I remember calling up John Wood and saying, "John, I've got a problem out here. People feel that mixed media is mixing oils and acrylics."

HEINECKEN: [laughs] Which doesn't work.

LEHMER: Right. John was very helpful, and he said he'd send some work out. So he came out from the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts], which was exciting to think of it, being from the Museum of Modern Art to the Boston museum to the





[Hockaday] Center for the Arts. I actually saw on his résumé recently all of these big ones, and then that little Hockaday Center. He had it. That made me feel good. But in one room I had his work, and then in another room I had the work of Andre Kertesz. It was in a sense a northwest Montana approach towards *Mirrors and Windows* or something. The idea was to show people the directions that the image can go.

HEINECKEN: Well, we've mentioned this before, and I think it's worth stating again, because it's important. The time period here--maybe it's ten years, maybe even longer than that--is when these curators, the creators of exhibitions, are really taking on the task of education. Even your own show is that same idea. It's not like, "This is the best" or anything. It's like, "This is an exhibition which is intended to instruct you about"--in this case--"the variance between a certain subject matter looked at from different points of view and different time periods."

LEHMER: 'Seventy-five is an important year. We've talked about it on a personal level. I'm trying to think of what I saw that reminded me of that that I wanted to go over.

[tape recorder off] So 1975, as we've talked about before, was a major turning point in your life. What I would like to review again is briefly what basic events



happened. And how did it manifest itself in your personal work? What was '75, again?

HEINECKEN: Well, this--which we discussed previously a little bit--would be the summer of '75 when Janet [Storey] and I decided to split up formally and I got out of the house. So it was obviously disruptive for everybody. I don't know that I could sense-- What am I trying to say here? The first thing that happens in something like that is that everything stops. There's nothing--no worrying about making pictures or getting this done or whatever. It just stops while the emotional state takes precedence over everything else. All of the conversations, all of the sorrys, and whatever have to-- You know, that takes a long time. So actually, I think if there were any exhibitions during that time period I would be surprised, because certainly it wouldn't be new work or anything that had happened during that time. It would have to be something from earlier. I think that extends probably for a whole year or something like that. In fact, a year from that summer would be the summer of '76, when the studio exploded. This is then another period of time, maybe another--what?--at least six months, ten months, where nothing happens except sort of piecing things together.

The point that I'm getting at here is that the only thing that did continue through all of that was the-- I



wouldn't call it a journal. Well, actually I'm just looking through a whole bunch of stuff that's written during that time period, which is all an attempt to externalize feelings and thoughts. How do events which are so important to one's personal life end up contributing or not or stopping or starting--? I mean, it's simply a period of complete confusion. The only thing which I'm saying is that in the writing it's all there. All the emotions are there. All the attempts are there to make a poetic structure out of that work in relation to the *He:/She:* proposition, which goes on all through that time period--at least the writing of it does. I don't know whether I've mentioned it before, but the *He:/She:* pictures are essentially verbal pictures. I mean there is visual stuff that illustrates it, but it doesn't illustrate it. It's just pictures that you can try to relate subjectively to whatever the writing is, which is also very subjective. So one point is that you don't need a studio to do all of that. Or even if you're trying to make pictures, you make SX-70 pictures, which are easy to do. I think it's important that no matter what happens to you, if you're sincere about trying to continue your creative life and your imagination, there are always ways to do that. In this case it's writing, continuing to try to express an emotional state through writing. I think



anybody who would have access to this material and look at it would understand the state of mind that's there. I don't know how I got off on that.

LEHMER: So that the work that you created--

HEINECKEN: And then, of course at the end of this time period, most of the familial problems get resolved in one way or the other. I stopped running around so much, I met Joy [Joyce Neimanas], and that becomes an increasingly stable situation. So that's an eighteen-month period which is just chaotic. But still, material comes out of it that either was useful then as catharsis probably, or was used in later ways to continue the *He:/She:* pattern of making artwork.

LEHMER: But the artwork that was manifested was strongly verbal.

HEINECKEN: I don't think that photography, even though you might manipulate, has the capacity to be really an expressive art. It has to be expressed manually, physically. You have to see the anger, you have to see the pain. Poets can write about that, anybody can write about it. But to try to follow a pattern in the way that I was working visually would have been nonsense. I wouldn't have been in the mental state to do it. You don't have the space to do it. You don't have the materials. You don't have the willpower, whatever. But





you can drink yourself into something and start writing it. That's simple. Writers do that. So it's a critical time period there that I'm describing, but I can't really put my finger on how it was critical. I guess that the thing that I internalized out of it was that no matter how chaotic or screwed-up things get, you still have a responsibility to try to make sense out of it if you're an artist. There's got to be some way that you can feed it back into the whole situation without actually going into a complete funk and stopping.

LEHMER: At that time you in '76 lectured at the Art Institute of Chicago and Columbia College. Is that right?

HEINECKEN: That's right.

LEHMER: It was probably a good distraction to get out of Culver City [California] so that you weren't having to be reminded of that trauma. It was your first studio, and then it was destroyed. I think we've mentioned that you came out of the situation with a studio. You went into transition. You were living in the [Pacific] Palisades at Henry Miller's place with Twinka [Thiebaud]. You didn't have a studio, and then all of a sudden you had a studio, but it blew up. It was like one misadventure after another in a sense. What kind of work were you planning on doing? Was there something that was destroyed at Culver City that you never could recapture? I'm thinking



of work in progress, like "God, I've got myself a big studio. There's been something in my head that I've been wanting to do for a long time."

HEINECKEN: Well, the only thing that comes to mind was finally being without the responsibilities per se of the family and the marriage. If one didn't have a place to go, you would just die. I mean, it's just too traumatic a shift.

I had just finished printing the *Cliche Vary* lithographs. Those pictures were laid out all over the studio drying because they had to be air-dried after printing them. So everything was laid out in there. If there was any loss physically it was the loss of those pictures, because that had been probably a year's work putting all that together and doing the printing and creating the stuff. Some of it survived, or some of what I had mailed out already and stuff like that. But basically I lost a couple of hundred pictures.

LEHMER: Which you don't retrieve.

HEINECKEN: No. But I think losing the pictures was not as important as losing the studio and almost losing my life. I mean, these things can be ranked in importance.

LEHMER: There are some themes that repeat or keep surfacing throughout your career in the sixties and seventies and eighties. You refer to material in fashion



magazines, news magazines, mass media, television, right down to TV dinners.

HEINECKEN: But just listening to those titles and seeing them in your mind--this is all in contrast to what we were talking about previously--this is all pretty light-headed stuff. I don't mean to say it's not serious, because it is, but it's light. There are jokes, there's humor, there are plays on combinations and things, none of which could possibly express the state of mind that I'm trying to remember or discuss with you. I think what I said earlier is interesting after thinking more about it, which is that the medium doesn't lend itself to physical, expressive situations. Maybe to some people it does, but I can't put my mind on it. If you think of the gesture of German expressionism and all that, where you can physically take something out of yourself-- Photography is not a very interesting medium for that, but I think writing is.

LEHMER: Do you think of photography as more of a cerebral thing? There must be some kind of a link where you equate photography to language--

HEINECKEN: Well, we've mentioned that.

LEHMER: --which you've mentioned before. What I'm getting at is, is it more of a cerebral act?

HEINECKEN: Well, it is contrasted to a physical act. I mean, there is no physical--



LEHMER: But there have been times in your work where you've attempted to make your work physical.

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah. There's things like--

LEHMER: There were the formal blocks, later on there were the crumpled collages, and then your most recent work.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I'm going to try to figure out the terms here that would separate the physical from the expressive, because these are related things. What I'm getting at is that the gesture of a tool, let's say, in making an image, or the brushing or the stabbing or the cutting of it, those things are not just physical, but the mark that's left from that kind of an act is a mark which has that gesture in it. So you could take static images and layer them and you'd come up with something that's a montage or superimposition, but you don't see the hand in it. That's the point I'm trying to make. It's kind of a difficult point. Painting, of course, in its highest form as we know it, is a gestural idea. Choices are made which are left as marks in that work, which aren't made with photographic images in that way.

LEHMER: That's true. That physical, textural--

HEINECKEN: Although in the Bellocq pictures-- These are glass plates. [tape recorder off] Somebody on various of these glass plates before they were rediscovered had actually scratched the surface off of the genital areas or





even the faces of these people so as to clean them up or make them anonymous people. At least that's one possibility. But see, that's not a photographic act. That's simply a gestural act which then shows up when the photograph is printed. [tape recorder off]

LEHMER: So the three people in that show-- What about the photographs that Friedlander found of Bellocq's work? You say they weren't necessarily documentary. It could have been a documentary attempt without a conscious understanding of what documentary was--

HEINECKEN: Well, that's true.

LEHMER: --by a portrait photographer trained in portraiture. He used his skills to document a culture that was not visually documented until then that we know of.

HEINECKEN: Well, it's interesting, because there maybe would have been, of these same women, obviously erotic, pornographic photographs made at that time. That was a big business.

LEHMER: Yeah, that's right.

HEINECKEN: But you have in this situation, this city-- New Orleans remains today a city where whatever wants to happen is going to happen. Nobody pays any attention to it. It's a wonderful city that way. What's interesting about the photographs for me is the absolutely deadpan



strategies involved. I mean, they are the prostitutes, and they're in either their prostitute clothes or nude. There's just in the setting of it--I don't know what the comparison would be--something that ordinarily is beyond the pale of cultural acceptability that can be neutralized by something like the camera. You're simply seeing the room they live in or they work in, what they look like, but without the gesture of eroticism or the activity of sex. I don't think there's any other thing like that that comes to my mind. It's just an amazing thing.

LEHMER: The ideas that we've tossed out here remind me of my brother [J. Richard Lehmer], who is a history teacher in Kansas City. He came out to visit once, and he said to me, "Don't you think art is elitist?" Whatever we were leading up to, it led up to that question. And I said, "Well, I think that it takes on the airs of being elite." That's because most of us have lost the ability to read visual work metaphorically. We have lost the skills to think metaphorically. We are crippled because of that.

Why I'm bringing this up is that it reminds me of what we're discussing. That is that you can have these people who, even though they're partially clothed, are actually dressed up from their "professional attire" in the provocative gestures and positions that they might be very familiar with because it's their profession. They're



not consciously, overtly attempting to be provocative. Yet somebody is looking at it literally, not metaphorically, and is upset by the fact that there might be exposed genitalia or something and is going to scratch it off. There is that gesture. It's very harsh when you see it. It's just like Tom [Thomas F.] Barrow's pieces, the Cancellation series, which is very abrupt.

HEINECKEN: But that's a ploy.

LEHMER: It's a ploy, but it's--

HEINECKEN: I mean, this is an interesting ploy--

LEHMER: It's a cerebral thing that he was trying to do, but it was a very physical act. I question that his cerebral fencing or sport did not cover up the physical, emotional things that I felt were going on. It's the same as Uta Barth's work that she did a while back, where there was this small picture of a home, and a light was on inside, and it was dusk. Very inviting. There was warmth in there somehow. It was a very interesting story. She would talk to me about that work on some--

HEINECKEN: Formal level.

LEHMER: --physical, theoretical level that was so hard. And I'm saying, "Whoa, whoa. Stop." So there are these people who I think are overly cerebral, or that there is in the art culture and the academic environment a strong pressure or need to justify your work on a highly cerebral



level.

HEINECKEN: Well, these are strategies that one employs for a period of time when it's useful, and then it goes into something else or evolves into something else. But it's a kind of pictorial device to make you conscious of the intellect in it or of how smart the person is. With the Cancellation stuff, I always thought it was really nothing more than when you're a photographer and you've got a proof sheet, you take your grease pencil and you make an "x" over the ones that obviously you're not going to use, and you circle certain things. If you don't know that activity, then these pictures that are so-called "cancellations" don't make any sense. It's a mild comment about the practice of photography. And Uta's thing, which I can't explain that simply, is another pictorial strategy to let the work reference something that's an inside joke or inside situation. Photography is perfect for that, anyway. It's entirely contextual within the framework that it's seen in and the viewer's attitude about what they're looking at. All art does that to some extent.

LEHMER: I'm bringing all this up because there's something that I'm hoping I can articulate well enough regarding your work. That is that you've dealt with erotic images whose initial intent was soft-pornographic imagery in magazines. You recontextualized these images.





That was in a sense more voyeuristic about the society that promoted the work than about the work itself. But there is that conflict between the seductiveness of the original image that is still there. So I think one has to question whether a lot of the work that you did with news magazines and television and a lot of your exposure of hypocrisy of society and the cultural inconsistencies-- I might have mentioned this earlier on tape, but there seems to be an ethic that might have prevailed through the different generations of the Heineckens, so to speak. Instead of being on the formal level that was with your past generations, some of those ethics were still prevalent in you. Yet there have been people who have raised questions about the success of your work or the credibility of it. I'm thinking of one series that was quite interesting. I happened to be around when that debate that was happening in *Spot* magazine out of Houston by Allan Sekula-- You handled it very well, although you didn't actually ever respond. There were all these other people who responded. I can't remember all the people.

HEINECKEN: Well, [James] Hugunin started the whole mess.

LEHMER: Jim Hugunin started it. He wrote an article about your work. You have seemingly dealt with a lot of ethics and cultural ideas, social ideas, and documentary ideas over the years. The fashion work and the



conflicts--like in *Are You Rea*--became less of a conflict and almost more supportive of a certain sexuality or lust. Then Jim Hugunin writes this article. Do you remember the gist of that article?

HEINECKEN: Well, within the article in which he is discussing all of these things, he makes the point--this will have to be loosely correct--that something about what Allan Sekula was doing at the time was related to my work. Sekula was involved in something called *The Archive*. But in any event, what triggered the anger in Sekula, at least initially, was not about my work, it was about Hugunin suggesting that such low ideas like I might have could be relatable to something as lofty, as objective, as cerebral as his "real" work. It would be suggesting that there was a relationship. That's what got to him. That's why he responded the way he did. The first letter he writes back is pretty much about that. He makes some cuts at me because he's angry and whatever, but it's mainly directed at Hugunin. And then, of course, the response is back and forth. It started going on with other people who are writing letters to the editor about it, including myself finally. It was interesting, because I think I might have had the same response. If someone is taking something that I don't respect and relating it to my work, I might have the same response to that. I probably wouldn't be as



angry about it, but I would certainly want clarification about what was being said about me. I tend to respond sometimes like that--not in public. I wouldn't write a letter to the editor. I would call the person up and say, "Look, I don't think this is right" or "I disagree." I've done that.

But the interesting thing which just popped into my mind is that we were talking about Are You Rea, which I think was probably my first concentrated effort to make some kind of point about what I'm doing. One of those things is that because the pictures are made from this magazine page idea, we know that you're getting the front and the back of the picture, which puts it into superimposition and sort of confuses stuff. So you can take any two pictures, whether they're on a magazine page or not, and put them together so you can't read them. Then the process here of contact printing the page to the paper produces a negative image. Have we discussed this?

LEHMER: A little bit.

HEINECKEN: Here's what's interesting about this to me: you could take the most unacceptable pornographic picture and print it in negative, black and white. How could someone be offended by that? You can't read it. They see the figure, they see all the stuff that they're not supposed to see, but it's reversed from your normal



vision, so you have to actually read it for what it is.

LEHMER: Well, that's a good point. I wasn't sure that I agreed with you after you said that. I thought about it driving down the road days later.

HEINECKEN: Well, it's not a truth, it's just a proposition. What happens when you look at a negative image?

LEHMER: But I think it comes back to what I was talking about, and that is that we don't look at a pornographic image for its reality but for its effect metaphorically. I mean, all it is is ink on paper, but in a sense it's like you might desire something that isn't there. It's the ultimate metaphor even though it's dealing with what we think is reality. It's a real picture.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. It's not made from an imagination, it's made from the culture.

LEHMER: So that if it is working on that metaphoric level of desire-- It's not the sexual physical act itself, but you can reference the potential. What I'm thinking is that because of that possibility, then the negative is also going to work, because it's still referencing on a metaphoric level.

HEINECKEN: Right.

LEHMER: My thought is that it's not a real thing. My question comes back to what my brother was saying about





what we have become as a society. That is, that we've become--

Maybe I take a different view, not as educated and a lot more naive, than you of what text is. To me it reminds me of a lawyer: it's easy to manipulate the words, but it's hard to manipulate the image. It's easy to say something, but it's hard to do something. It's harder for me to do something than to say it. We have become a society that is very adept at doing things on a literal or verbal level. It's like you don't trust someone or believe it until you have it in writing. "I'll have my lawyer look at it." That's why lawyers are one of the highest-paid professions in our culture right now, not the shamans.

HEINECKEN: [laughs] Well, they were never paid very well. They just got a lot of free time.

LEHMER: Oh, they were paid very well by their societies. They were the kings of a society.

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah, that's true. But their difference from the poorest person in the culture was not as great as [the distance from] our poorest person to our lawyers. They are the shamans--

LEHMER: You're right.

HEINECKEN: --but they don't have any ethics. It's a shaman without ethics or a belief system except for money.



LEHMER: Well, it's interesting, because I think that it reflects the audience's values. It gets back to--I think I mentioned it--a class I took at San Francisco Art Institute, Films as They Hit the Street.

HEINECKEN: Oh, you've mentioned it, yeah.

LEHMER: It was not about the film but it was about the society that would respond to that film on a commercial level. We were looking at commercial films. Now, we have to remember that the year that I did that was in the early seventies. But you referred to--what you know so well about--this power and the strength at that time of the independent film. It was still very much a viable entity.

HEINECKEN: Well, not to interrupt, but also if you think about the music of the time, the educational upheaval of the time, the free love, the casual sex-- I mean, this is a time period that probably will never be repeated in any way. All of those elements will never be set up that way again.

LEHMER: The importance of this class was to try to study a society that would patronize these films on a commercial level, such as *A Clockwork Orange* or *Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, to give you an idea of some of the films we saw in that class. The question that I'm trying to get to in regard to your work is the debate between the metaphoric level that you have control over as an artist versus the



literal level, which is like the raw materials. That's the way that I'm defining it.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, but you want to always make the distinction. I think that what the artist might be seeing in it or making it mean is not necessarily what the viewer sees. There's always that breakdown or that dichotomy between one person's vision of something versus another's. We all have different takes on these things. When you enter into something like so-called pornography, you have the most wide variance of opinions about these things that you could possibly have. I think it's basically limited to American culture. We're a weird country that way. The sexual practices of each culture are different.

LEHMER: Yeah, the societies all have--

HEINECKEN: Well, I was going to get off into the American problem of fear of [inaudible].

LEHMER: Well, that is kind of interesting. I mean, that goes back to some of the things that your family has dealt with.

HEINECKEN: Well, it is interesting that my personal situation as it evolves from childhood is--



TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE TWO

MAY 25, 1996

LEHMER: Okay, your personal childhood--

HEINECKEN: It's still bound up in my background of my family's religion. That never escapes you. It is never eliminated, but it's modified or altered. It continues to inform all of our lives one way or the other, our beliefs.

Let me change gears here a minute. I think we haven't talked about this before, but if I have we can stop it. When I'm working on something-- You know, these kinds of clear thoughts never come to you when you are doing something. That's basically what I believe. You look at it when it's done. You throw it away, or you change it, or you use it. It's not a matter of trying to make something right. The thing is so easy to do in a sense. You can get a look at something like a photograph in a very small amount of time. You can toss it or put an "x" through it, like we were talking about. The point I'm making here is to try to explain in a teaching situation a system of how an individual might begin to look at things as opposed to the way they were taught to look at things.

In the arena that we're talking about here in teaching, particularly in workshops, I would always bring up a specific situation, not because it only pertains to





me, but it pertains to everybody. I'll take five words: sensual, erotic, sexual, pornographic, obscene. Then I'll say, "Okay, there's a range of terms that define certain kinds of pictures or activities. Now, you look at these words, and you put them in an order that you feel is from the subjective to the objective. Then you have to explain what's subjective and what's objective. Go home and do that. Think about it and come back tomorrow. We'll look at it." You can take all those rankings that they've now made--they've got five words in a line that says "objective here, subjective here"--then graph that out on the blackboard for them, show them that between these ten or twelve or fifteen people there's absolutely no consensus about what these words mean when you have to consider that there's an objective term and a subjective term.

It's a very interesting exercise to do, not because I invented it necessarily, but because it just informs people that they don't know how they're going to use these terms. Everything in their belief system would make all these pictures pornographic, let's say. But to a judge, some of these pictures are "obscene." "Obscene" is a legal term now. Pornography per se--whatever we're calling it--is legal; obscenity is not. There is something that makes "obscene" the most objective state of these words because it's a judge saying, "This is



obscene." Bang. "Go to jail, destroy it," whatever. At the other end of that scale for me would be sensual things which have nothing to do with sex, necessarily. It can be a piece of stone or wood that's been carved in such a way that you want to touch it. You want to feel it. You want a sensed curve. You don't want angles and all that. This has nothing to do with sex. It has to do with a physical capacity to understand a feeling which doesn't arouse sexual feelings but gives you a sense of using your senses. You're feeling things, you're looking at things-- So anyway, it's an exercise which I like to give to people, because it doesn't tell them how to think about them, it just tells them that they're not thinking about them.

The terms can be identified. You can really analyze whether something's pornographic, for instance. I would say, first of all, you have to have a mechanical way of reproducing the picture--photography, film, printing of some kind. You have to have a culture of subject matter that is willing to participate in this for the money that's involved. These are our actors, basically. You have to have a distribution system, which is why you have to have a reproductive system, so you can make hundreds of thousands of these. Then you have to get them out of there. You have to make a magazine or a film. You have



to get it in the mail. It has to have distribution. It's not illegal necessarily until someone takes it to the next step.

You can think about "erotic" as a term whose meaning is ancient. This is clearly a picture or writing that's made to induce sexual feelings. To eroticize something, to make it into an object that you-- It's not a fetish necessarily, but it's a feeling that is used, particularly by men, to become aroused. That's the function of it. You can say, "Well, that's an erotic picture." It's not pornographic, because it's not made-- If it's a painting, let's say, by my terms, it can't be pornographic. You can't distribute it. It's for one person to own and look at. That's an ancient idea. The Vatican has the largest collection in the world of erotic art. This is true. I don't know why they have it. Basically it's to get it off the streets, I guess. [laughs]

When you say something is "sexual," it's pretty simple to define: it depicts or talks about sexual activity. That's all it does. You can have a doctor's discussion of sex which is sexual. It's not pornographic, and it's certainly not erotic, but it has to do with subject matter that depicts sexual activity and nudity, usually.

LEHMER: Now, nudity-- You're bringing up something that I



think is interesting. What some people might consider forbidden territory is the erotic-- No, we'll say "sexual." I'm not sure which term would be used.

HEINECKEN: Well, see, that's the point. We don't know. Your sense of where it belongs is different than mine, different than anybody else's.

LEHMER: But I'm thinking very specifically about how people define it. It always was intriguing to me how there are certain "forbidden," quote, unquote, territories. For the longest time *Playboy* survived because of its sexual themes--"playmate of the month" and all that--but that there were certain forbidden areas left to be photographed on the female nude. Those become forbidden, so people would desire to seek that out. Then comes *Penthouse* magazine, then *Hustler* magazine. Then there's the famous [Hugh] Hefner response that, "We're not a gynecological magazine. We're not going to stoop to those levels," or something, as if it were a higher level, which I've always found interesting, because there's almost something forbidden about it. Performing a sexual act on a honeymoon at a resort in some exotic place is one thing, but in the back of a furniture store-- Or I heard they used to have these stories about where the most unusual place was that you ever performed sex. Someone mentioned, "We went into the PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric] tent on





a telephone pole." There's something arousing about the forbidden. Then you get into the areas of child pornography or the area of, as you said, "the willing performer" or something. Then the question of the unwilling--

HEINECKEN: Uninformed or unwilling.

LEHMER: It comes down to the quote that I heard about the Japanese during World War II, "Japanese sex slaves."

That's an interesting term, "sex slave." Not that it's right or not, but there seems to be an interaction of not only sexuality but of power and breaking the laws of the society. When you think of the bathing suits that you can see on Venice beach [California] now, some of the physical exposure of someone on rollerblades going down the Venice boardwalk versus the turn of the century where people had to be fully clothed from their neck down or something--

HEINECKEN: Well, these things do change through history, but more importantly they change from culture to culture. You mentioned the Japanese. Japanese art has a fully developed history of erotic art. This is art, by my terms, made to sexually excite one. It's built into the history of visual arts in that country. It's still there very strongly. But it doesn't upset people of that race or religion like it does our race and our religion.

LEHMER: I wonder about the oppression of that natural



desire, if it doesn't create a perversion that we find in our sexual mores, so to speak. Maybe things that might be considered wrong in a society like Japan are more prevalent in our culture. So I'm wondering if it's like putting the lid on a pot of boiling water--you're going to have an explosion.

HEINECKEN: I think in a sense that that's correct. That's one of the problems with this country. It's so class driven. The separation of level of intelligence and education-- It's a screwy place. We don't need to get off into this, but it's the most interesting place because of the confusion that exists here.

Child pornography is a very interesting and complicated thing, because those are not necessarily unwilling or willing people, but their age in our culture makes them neutral or innocent when, of course, they're not necessarily. The point here is that we're driven by the laws of the country. We're not driven by our own laws or anybody else's laws. If you don't want to go to jail in this country, then you do not get into child pornography, that's clear. Or if you do you do it in such a way that you try not to get caught. The attitudes of most of the people about child pornography would be consistent with 90 percent of us: we don't think that this is right to do. It's not because of the sexual



situation, it's because of the innocence of the people involved in it.

But if you have adults who are making their living by performing in a pornographic film or whatever, it's not illegal. You can't prosecute these people. Then you get the "snuff" film idea, if you recall that. A snuff film purportedly was something where people were killed in sexual situations. Well, I don't know whether there were or were not such films. There were certainly very strong rumors and indications that there were such films. They always seemed to come from foreign countries where life wasn't taken as seriously as we do here.

But anyway, I like the idea of trying to bring some structure to help understand sexual feelings or sexual images without saying "It's bad" or "It's okay," because it's a continuum where it's not boxes, that this is "this" and then there's "this." They're all intermingled in our minds depending upon our education, our culture, whatever. If we want to, we have to behave in this country within the current boundaries of the law. The law changes, the activity changes.

Drugs are a very interesting thing in this country. It's the biggest industry and the most pervasive thing. I can't seem to figure out why don't they change the laws and see what happens, see if it gets better. Look at



Prohibition. That's not an exact parallel, but you can probably stop a culture from using drugs or whiskey or whatever.

You can't stop a culture from having sex. It's just not going to work. In some form or another they like it, they need it.

LEHMER: A lot of your work could be described as voyeuristic. You're like an outsider observing a society and commenting on that with an opinion of what's been going on through the years. But in some of the more recent work you're just an active participant. I'm thinking of some of the photograms that you and I worked on that were not so socially or politically critical but were more highly aesthetic. The images worked well together. There wasn't the pressure of the artist commenting on the society.

HEINECKEN: Well, I think that's true. I don't know how this affects other artists, but certainly as an individual you come to understand certain things by doing them, making them, thinking about them. Once you understand it I think you lose that edge of not understanding it, which creates the chaos of it. Once that's over with it's no longer that interesting to deal with. You move on to something else. Well, I do. Although I think most things that continue to interest me one way or the other are





sexual-based things. Whether that happens to be a meal as opposed to physical sex, or it happens to be the sensuality of food or the absence of sensuality of food, there are still things that are connected to this in some way. Some of these things are driven by adolescence, and some are driven by something after that.

You mentioned Henry Miller. This man never changed his attitude about it. I mean, at eighty-something years old he had it. But these are unique individuals whose focus and their understanding of their own focus is so great and so powerful that they don't need to change it.

I was reading something about Timothy Leary. You know he's dying now.

LEHMER: That's right.

HEINECKEN: He didn't change. He's exactly the same person--the same beautiful understanding of things, the same arrogance, the same everything, right up to creating his own death in the way that he wants it to happen. I'm using him because he's now an old man too, like Henry Miller was.

So certain people, I think, are capable of sustaining themselves even through a whole variety of situations in their lifetime and still they are focused pretty much on one thing. I'm not that person, but I don't think I'll stop making art or stop writing at some point. I'll at



least be doing something to get up for in the morning.  
That's all.

One more thing I would say about this is that--I don't know if this would be a blanket statement--if I understand the range of these terms in the pictures involved, what seems to be interesting is to take something that would clearly be in the category that's understood as, let's say, pornography-- It is a magazine. It exists in millions of copies. It's sold. It's performed by willing people. To take that box and make it into something that is not pornographic or alter it somehow is what's interesting to me about this. You know that you're looking at something that is something in your mind, but it doesn't look quite right, you know? It's not working for me. It doesn't do what it's supposed to do.

LEHMER: Which was your attempt with the negatives.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. There's a whole variety of different ways of dealing with it. To take the Vietnamese soldier holding those heads, which is difficult to understand how that happens, but obviously, people cut people's heads off. They're proud of it. You put that in the context-- Which I'd say is really not sexually obscene, but it is a very powerful, obscene, terrible thing. You put that over a fashion ad [referring to his piece *Periodical #5*], then you're not sure what kind of-- You know it's evil, but



what's it doing in this magazine? What pervert would do this?

LEHMER: Well, for the purpose of this tape and this interview and for future reviewers or researchers, we might want to mention what you're referring to. That was what I would define as one of your guerrilla projects. I'm going to guess it was during the Vietnam War, which would possibly be the late sixties, early seventies.

HEINECKEN: It's at the end, yeah.

LEHMER: You actually, if I remember the story, went out to your local magazine stand and you bought up all the *Time* magazines, or you bought a lot of them. Why don't you describe this project in your own words.

HEINECKEN: This starts with the publication of two photographs--both in *Time* or *Newsweek*, I forget--probably in the early seventies, I would think, or the late sixties. One is a photograph of this South Vietnamese general shooting this guy in the temple on the street. Next to it was a photograph of this soldier holding two decapitated heads. I looked at both of them and thought, "Well, I've got to do something with this." So I made copies of both of them. Then I chose the one which was the least political, and that was the "heads" thing, because we don't know if "Now, is this North Vietnamese or South Vietnamese? Whose heads are they?" that sort of thing. Whereas with the



other, we know that's general so-and-so; he's assassinating another guy. The guy holding him is a guard. We know that he's North Vietnamese and the other's South. That's the picture that caught the public's imagination, because they used it and used it and used it. They still use it. Whereas the other picture just dropped completely out because it was never reproduced. It was too much. You can't have these heads--

So anyway, I simply took that image of the guy with the heads and put it into offset plates and then took magazines apart so that I had single pages of all these different magazines. Then I just ran them through the offset press so that the image of the Vietnamese soldier with the heads is imprinted on the back and front of all of these pages through a variety of magazines--news, fashion, whatever. Next I recollated them into individual magazines that would have on every page this image in black ink over color, over all kinds of different articles from the magazines.

Then a certain number, I think seven or eight of those, I snuck back onto the newsstand. I put *Time* magazine covers on these things, because *Time* magazine was-- At least, in observing people at the newsstand, you might go thumb through *Playboy* or *Good Housekeeping*, but *Time*, you know what it's going to be. It's all the news that you need to know about in one week. You buy it, put it under your





arm, and get on the bus. So you're gone from the place when you discover that you've got something screwy in your hands. Then I also took a group of those and put them in dentists' and doctors' offices where they have all these magazines. My dentist was in Westwood here. Those offices are empty in the morning. Nobody cares if you're waiting or not. You just put it in there and go. So those two places were where I fed it back into the system, so to speak. But a distribution of seven or eight or whatever it was in a city like Los Angeles, or another seven or eight in a doctor's office, that's nothing. There's no effect.

LEHMER: So why did you do it?

HEINECKEN: Well, to get it done. I mean, I just liked the idea that somebody somewhere is going to open this magazine up and going to be confused about it, is going to wonder about it. The real energy of all of that goes into the artwork and the exhibitions. The actual penetration of the culture on an individual level was an interesting thing to me, but the effect was not there. As a better effect, I took maybe five hundred of these individual pages and mailed them out to everybody that I knew, who are already, for the most part, people who would not need this.

LEHMER: That's before the day of buying mailing lists



[laughs], like L.L. Bean or something.

HEINECKEN: I think most of these went to the SPE membership. I just went through my address book and sent it to everybody. Those are around. Those that people kept are now showing up in museums, the individual pages.

The magazines are gone. I don't know what I would have done if I had bought that magazine and discovered it. I don't know what I'd do. Most people probably just said, "Well, there is something that's just wrong here" and got rid of it.

The reason for that story is to take something that is obviously produced and seen in a context that is not the one that you see it in now, whether that be in an exhibition or artwork or magazines on the street, whatever. It's taking something from one point on this continuum and moving it into the other sector so that it's confused. It's something out of place.

LEHMER: Why do you do that?

HEINECKEN: That's the way my mind is. I don't know.

LEHMER: All artists seem to tamper with something in a sense. There is an objective to making things more clear by shifting things. We talked about that with Lenny Bruce or George Carlin. That's why I think I like them so well, because they are so similar to a lot of the artists that I like who are the barometers of a culture. I still believe



that good art is going to be the barometer of a culture. How do you study ancient cultures? By their artifacts. Maybe that is elitist in the sense that they have some lofty idea as to why you're doing this. Robert, why aren't you teaching people how to fly planes? Why are you altering work, manipulating work? There is an objective. Yes, maybe there is something screwy in interpretation. But you've got to--I've talked about this before; maybe I can't get it through my thick skull--be thinking about an audience, and then you say, "No."

HEINECKEN: Well, you're always thinking about an audience. For me, thinking about the audience comes after it's done, after the whole thing is produced, whatever it might be. I have made a couple of pictures for someone using materials that we both recognized as a kind of-- It's like kissing someone. It's a connection that we know about, so it's our thing. But other than that there is no audience, really, to begin with. I mean, I have a gallery. I can take everything to the gallery. That's not my audience. But it's their job to figure out if there is an audience and, if so, how to do it. It's something that's not necessarily inborn or learned even, necessarily.

I have to externalize and make tangible internal feelings and ideas. It's just that I have to do it. The



reason I'm talking to you is because I have to do it. It has nothing to do with art. It's to make tangible or try to make sense out of vague feelings, vague occurrences. I think we all do that one way or the other.

LEHMER: Through the artwork or the production of art you begin to become more clear on things. It's like there can be two steps forward, one step back. Or it's not that you resolve a problem but you grow in enlightenment through the actual making of the work.

HEINECKEN: Well, I think there are all kinds of important, lofty ideas connected with being an artist or writer. I think for me and for most people, as I understand it, they don't know what to do other than that. They know they've got to do something. I mean, when you get up in the morning you come to a place like this and you start doing something. Whether it's going to be art, you don't know, but you're doing something with it. It's a necessity.

LEHMER: It's important that we try to create that space.

HEINECKEN: This came up the other day about the students. I don't know how you can actually convert a graduate student into this state of mind where it doesn't matter. You have to figure out how to do it and why to do it and what to do with it. If you want that life, then you've got to figure this out. The culture and society are not





going to give it to you. You are an outsider. If you are an outsider with some gift or insight, maybe you can have a life as an artist. Maybe. It doesn't mean you sell your work or you're famous, but you're doing it.

LEHMER: Ernie [Ernesto] Scott, one of your grad students, once said to me, "God, if I couldn't get access to the tools that I am procuring right now to make the art that I need to make, I'd be using a Xerox machine."

HEINECKEN: Yeah. That's a mature statement.

LEHMER: I respected that. Whereas I felt, "God, when I leave this institution and don't have access to that color processor, I'm not going to be able to make work."

HEINECKEN: Well, see, now that's why I think writing is really the highest form of all this. It's all in your mind. You don't need anything. You need quiet and you need privacy, but that's all you need as opposed to making an eight-zillion-dollar movie or something. This is a big deal, complicated. For me, visual arts and writing were always at the pinnacle of these things, because it's an individual doing it. You don't need anything, really, to do it. Or you need minimal kinds of things as opposed to if you're a choreographer. You have equal opportunity to make something important, but as a choreographer you need a stage, you need fifty people, you need lighting, an audience. These are all things that come with that



business and movies, whatever. If you're a writer it's good if you get a book out of it, but you don't need a lot of support except for your mind.

I think that's why writing is so important to me in a sense, because it's like photography. Well, we've talked about this. You think you understand these words, and you do, but you can't imagine how this person got them into this particular sequence that still informs you about something but is beautiful in a way that you had never perceived these words to be used. To get it into a structure which we accept to be a conventional writing or poetic structure, these are the things that have to be learned by a writer. You could say conventional photography is simple writing. That's kind of off the head, but--

LEHMER: That thing that my brother said was very revealing about our culture. I look to my brother as a real barometer of our culture. Maybe it's the puritanical roots, but we talk about being very practical. A lot of the religions in this country suppress any kind of central activity. I use that in a very broad term.

I think of printmaking as a very central medium. I learned to feel the resistance of the ink on the roller, to listen-- I mean, I use my senses. Until I could free myself up enough to use my senses, I couldn't make a



decent print. Feeling the grease in the water and the ink on paper-- To get good at it you had to hear it, feel it, sense it.

HEINECKEN: That's right, yeah.

LEHMER: I see in you that ability to fly by the seat of your pants. Sure, you have learned a lot. You have to be smart when it comes to flying a plane, but there's also a feel. You were thrown into a situation where all the systems that you'd been trained to deal with blew up in your face and you had to get to earth in one piece. Some people do it, some people don't.

HEINECKEN: That's right.

LEHMER: I think that you relied on your senses, your intuition. You have learned to coordinate in your life the cerebral but also not to reject the intuitive or the sensual. I think that that's been suppressed in our culture an awful lot. We've become atrophied, literally, in our ability to read metaphorically.

HEINECKEN: Well, it's like-- I don't mean to interrupt. The thing that I had on the wall--I don't know if it's still up there--about that quote from that guy, I mean, that says it all. \*["The greatest difference between

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\* Heinecken added the following bracketed section during his review of the transcript.



the artist or poet and the ordinary person is found, as has often been pointed out, in the range, delicacy, and the connections he is able to make between different elements of his experience." I.A. Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism*] It's not the meaning of something, it's the relationship of that meaning to something else. Basically that's what it is. It's so simple.

LEHMER: There was a final thought that I wanted to discuss kind of off the subject. Since post-World War II you have been in Southern California. You moved, I think, to Glendale and then to Riverside. You have lived here for thirty years. You have had a great impact not only with your personal work but also with the program that you developed and the lives that you've influenced. You were an important player in putting Southern California on the map. We've talked about Ed [Edward] Ruscha and [John] Baldessari and people like that, but you're also a very important player in all this. It seems to me, as a close outsider, that you have made an incredible transition with relative smoothness in selling and making this change in the later years of your life. You're moving away from home base. In other words, it has not affected you like I imagine it would affect a lot of people. Home base to you is in your head in a sense. If you've got a table where you can write and lay things out on, you--





HEINECKEN: Luckily it's a situation that I don't have any control over. If it weren't for Joy and her work I wouldn't leave here. There's no reason for me to leave here, but also there's no reason for me to stay here. She has to fulfill her obligations to herself and to her work. She could do it here, but there's no money here, so she has to go to work again. It's necessary. We could go back there for two years and come back here, but it's so disruptive. We know how to do it, and we could do it as simply as possible, but you lose probably three months out of every year just moving. I'm not willing to give up that time or that energy anymore. It's just crazy.

I don't feel a connection to the community now as much as I did when I was teaching or when there were all these small battles to be fought. That was what was interesting about it. That's sort of over. There are new theoretical battles, but the battles don't interest me anymore. That work, that thinking, is just as important as any other thinking. It's just that I'm not interested in it. It's not that I'm too old. It doesn't interest me.

Also, I want to say before I forget-- You knew [Elliot J.] Elgart, who was my friend, the painter. He always said something in jest like--his kind of put-down of me--"You have to decide whether you want to be a big



fish in a little pool or a little fish in a big pool."

And he's saying to me, "Yeah, you're a big fish, but the pool of photography is nothing." He's a painter; that's a small fish in a big pool. It's true in a sense. That's a joke with him and me.

LEHMER: Well, the last question I have for this tape is-- You've been very productive here in the physical work that you've produced in thirty years. Why is your work not housed in Southern California?

HEINECKEN: It might have something to do with what I do. It might even be something about being a local person. But Los Angeles was not a place until recently where we had any sense of collections here. MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] is the first place. Of course, I think it's one of the best museum situations in the country, although they don't have the holdings of the Museum of Modern Art or any other place.

I don't know if this ever came up, but I worked on the artists advisory board at MOCA for two years every other week on Monday nights. It was just a tremendous amount of time that that group of people gave. Finally we realized that we weren't having the effect that we thought we were. They weren't listening to us, or they'd listen to us but they'd go ahead and do it another way. It did turn out that the museum and what it has performed as a



function has been excellent. I don't think it would be as good as it is if the artists weren't there bitching at them at all times. We insisted, which they wouldn't do, that there should be no collection. The first director agreed with that, and then that changed. It turns out, which we didn't really think out clearly, that you have to have collectors to put up the money for the artists to donate to the museum to write off for income tax. That's a system that is fixed and cannot be changed in this country. So they have a collection, but it's a waste of time.

LEHMER: Because art patronage is a private industry in this country. We can't seem to ever get into the public realm.

HEINECKEN: No, the government is supporting it. So the government in this case is the collector.



TAPE NUMBER: XI, SIDE ONE

MAY 26, 1996

LEHMER: I'd like to start out by finishing up with a couple of thoughts from yesterday's tape. We were talking about Southern California. With your impact on Southern California, my question is, why is not more of your work here? Why is there not a permanent housing? Why is your work collected at the Center for Creative Photography [at University of Arizona]? We can talk about Tucson and what it is. I think we were finishing up with what Los Angeles had, which was not much for permanent collections. You were beginning to talk about the artists advisory board for MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art]. I guess the question would be, what role did the artists play in the formation of MOCA?

HEINECKEN: I guess the first thing is that it was an experiment on the part of the people involved and certainly as a part of forming the staff of the new museum. At that point all they had was a director, I think. There were all kinds of rumors about who was going to do what and what kind of a place it was going to be. Of course, it was privately funded to a large extent, but the city had money in it as well--property, tax breaks, etc. It was obviously going to be the centerpiece museum





for the city. So all the artists would be interested in what this could be, based on what they perceived to be the failures of other museums, not just the [Los Angeles] County [Museum of Art] but other situations that they'd been in. I think it was always that the Museum of Modern Art in New York was sort of the standard. It's a very well organized, well-put-together situation, probably one of the best in the world. But I think most of us had some hesitations about the way it was structured, the way it was administered and all of that.

I don't even know how the artist advisory thing started. I think Duane Valentine and Robert Irwin were the people who sat down with it to begin with. I can't remember at what point I entered it. Lee [Leland] Rice was on the committee, and at some point early on he, I guess, left town. He recommended that I sit on it, so I did. There was an attempt actually to have a representation of people in different media. Photography was important at that point. That's why they had Lee Rice on there, because he was very active in curating and writing and all of that. It wasn't like, "You have to have a video artist, you have to have a painter, you have to this." It was just an attempt to have widespread media involved in it.

Not to belabor all this, but in the setting up of



departments within a museum which is traditional, curators who have run those departments for whatever reason didn't seem to be the ideal model from the standpoint of the way art was developing during this time period. There weren't the categories that existed before, so there was a lot of discussion about how to administer a museum without these departments. That finally did happen there. It wasn't because of what the artists said. They recognized that having departments of media eventually leads to a hierarchy of that media. Not that painting will always be at the top, but normally it would. So as far as the advisory board's input, it did set up the museum without these departments. That's the only thing, really, that I think was important about all of it.

LEHMER: I think you mentioned briefly yesterday that the one thing that the artists were concerned about was to try to reduce the importance--the burden, the baggage--that permanent collections create.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. There are other minor things that I remember discussing. Things like storage space in a museum for a collection is about 50 percent of the space, and then there's preparation space and all of that. By the time you get down to the exhibition space, you're probably at 20 percent of the building or something like that. That was an attempt to nullify that problem by not



having a collection. Traditionally, the people who are the trustees of a place like this are committed to supporting it financially, and to some extent so are all other people who go pay the fees. Eventually the trustees are setting the policy. This was the case, I think, at the County Museum. It was one of the problems that was there. You can't expect people to be putting millions of dollars into new buildings and new programs without having a say in it. The artists advisory board was seen as something that could be equally beneficial to the input of it. The collectors are not the clients, they're the support. They've got the money. But this group of artists felt that they had something to say about it also on an advisory level. That's all it ever was. Some of the things that we wanted to have happen did, some didn't. But it was probably the first time, at least in my memory, where a group of people-- We met Monday nights for a long time, off and on for maybe eighteen months--not every night, but we spent a lot of time with this. And mostly, as I said, it was Duane Valentine and Irwin who did most of the ideation about it, especially Irwin.

LEHMER: That's a big undertaking.

HEINECKEN: By the way, I left to go back to Chicago at some point. What I'm saying is, after I left it continued to function. I don't know at what point it stopped.



LEHMER: Did you recommend somebody to take your place?

HEINECKEN: I don't think so. By that point I think most of the things that anybody wanted to discuss probably had been discussed. I have a feeling that it didn't need to last much longer than that. I don't know whether there was another person involved in it or not.

LEHMER: Two ideas come up in my mind. One is, there is already a contemporary feature to the L.A. County Museum. Is this not a conflict of interest? How does one set up a museum like that and get public funding without the question being raised by the politicians and community members as to why we need to create and fund from a tax base another museum of contemporary art when the L.A. County is already providing that along with a historical inventory or survey?

HEINECKEN: Well, I don't know the history of the original County Museum beyond my experience with it. But the art component of this was simply that. It was a museum of science, anthropology-- It had a full range of activities, one of which was the art thing, which never really got promoted or funded to any extent more than any of the other things. So the need was to actually break away from that association, which were the other county museums which were all downtown.

LEHMER: But that had happened before MOCA was ever being





considered. I mean, they got that new building on Wilshire [Boulevard]--

HEINECKEN: Yeah. Oh, of course. But I'm saying that the first motive to think about here is that--again, I'm not an expert on this--the group of people put up the money to convince whoever to move that aspect out of the other complex of museums. Find a site, put up a building, pay for the building with some county money, although I think most of it was private money that moved it and built it. Out of necessity, some of the baggage that was associated with it first came with it, such as the decorative arts and large collections of Iranian rugs, let's say, something like that. All that had to come with it. Of course, those departments then became fixed and important. But something like MOCA obviously steered away from any of that sort of material and tried to make it a museum of contemporary art rather than history. Again, when you start a collection, it isn't too long before that becomes history. If you don't have a collection, then everything that happens there is contemporary. You don't need all that money to buy the stuff. Now, of course, they have a collection.

LEHMER: I find it interesting, because what I remember, the first exhibition for MOCA was curated, designed by collectors. It wasn't a matter of work by artists or work



by eras. It wasn't based on content. It was based on collections. It had "the collection of so-and-so, the collection of so-and-so." This was the first exhibition and I was just stunned by that.

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah. My memory's not good on it, but that may not have been something other than to, let's say, honor those individuals who had private collections.

Whether they were pressing those people to donate them or not I don't know. Certainly we shouldn't mislead or lose sight of the fact that there were important collections here--maybe ten big individual, private collections--which either had to go to the County, out of town, or to MOCA, because those were the only players. I think basically my and the artists' involvement in it was something interesting for us to do. We had a sense that we were involved in it. Whether they would listen to us or not, at least there was a forum by which we communicated to them. They gave each of us lifetime membership to the museum, which is worth some money. We're invited to all of the same functions the trustees are invited to, so we're at the top echelon of the social situation of the place. It isn't important to us, but it's nice that they did that.

One more thing. There was this guy named [K.G.] Pontus Hultén, who was Dutch or German or something. He



was to be the first director. So he was the person that we dealt with mostly. He was still in Europe, but he would come over, and we'd meet with him occasionally. It turned out that he never had it in mind that he was going to be the director. He was the "name." He's like a big shot, right? A real big shot. He's supposed to be the director. Then all the money and all the prestige that comes with someone like that was because he was going to do it. Well, it turns out it never was in the cards that he was going to do it. He was to be the magnet for all of this, and as soon as they got everything going he disappeared. The story is that he never intended to be the director but only the magnet. That's what his job was. I always thought that was pretty interesting. That's high-level thinking.

LEHMER: Yeah, you're right. Peter Ludwig, a big collector in Europe--a chocolate magnate in, I think, Cologne--his background was not only in business but also in art history. He was a big collector. He worked a deal, I think, in Cologne that he would create a museum and donate a tremendous amount of work to get this museum off the ground if they would lighten up on his chocolate manufacturing. I think there were labor concerns. But anyway, it was an interesting story. I know that he was also committee chair for the foreign interests at the



Museum of Modern Art and on the board at MOCA, which I found interesting. So they have a stellar committee of people. We're not talking about vice presidents of an oil company based in Los Angeles; we're talking about an internationally renowned list of art authorities.

HEINECKEN: This guy Hultén I think runs the Louvre now in Paris. That's the kind of job he went for.

LEHMER: The second question I have is, why is your work--? I mean, you've created a lot of work, personal artifacts-- I don't know the term. All your materials that you've generated over the years, the majority of those materials are being housed at the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson. How did that come about?

HEINECKEN: Well, the first thing--let me just think a minute here--I would mention is what you brought up earlier about being local. I think that still has something to do with it. It's not uncommon maybe for people in any business or any endeavor to look outside of the immediate surroundings or environment for their expertise, because there's always the sense that there's an inborn quality to local or resident situations. I think that's just a natural thing that everybody goes through. I don't think that it's unusual for that to happen. This is related to something else that I want to mention.





Parallel to this is going to work at UCLA, and I've explained how that happened and the kind of accidental quality of that. It's not really a very good idea for a person--like the Harvard [University] story you just told--to go and teach at the school that they went to, because you're always remembered as a student. You have to wait another thirty years before all those people who were your teachers are dead. And they never forget it, either. It's not a good situation.

LEHMER: It was a stupid story that I told you, because you did that here.

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah. But I don't think I would have done it had I been smarter. It was a marvelous opportunity. I took it, and I'm glad I took it, because it worked out. It's not an ideal situation. I would never recommend that they do that at UCLA or any other place unless the circumstances are such that there's no other way to do it or something like that.

LEHMER: You overcame some major obstacles.

HEINECKEN: Well, the thing that helped me, as I've explained, was starting a new program here. If I would have, let's say, for whatever reason continued to be in drawing or painting or printmaking or design or whatever, it would have been terrible. Then you're simply propagating the thing that you know about. In this



instance, nobody knew anything about what we were doing anyway. And as I pointed out before, the whole College of Fine Arts was being formed. Any idea was possible, because it was a reform that we were looking at. So I don't think I suffered as much as I would have if I had not been inventing a whole new thing. If I were simply carrying on the institutions' former ideals as another artist--painter or whatever--it wouldn't have worked.

LEHMER: I think the other thing we have to mention is how you perceive the Center for Creative Photography. It's a unique institution. You obviously feel comfortable with them to the point where you're giving them every bit of personal information that you have ever held onto over the years.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. I guess the first thing that I would clarify is that the gallery that I worked with during this time period was Light Gallery in New York, which was directed by Harold Jones. He was the first director when it opened. I had known him actually when he was a student in a summer workshop he took that I worked in. [Robert] Fichter was in this same class, and so were [Robert] Sobieszek and Tom [Thomas F.] Barrow. These were all students in this course. It was an amazing group of people, not because I was there but because Nathan Lyons was there, and he stirred these people up. Every one of



those people, with a few exceptions, went into professional work in the field of photography. It's amazing. And Harold was one of them. But anyway, when he left the gallery he went to be the first director of the Center for Creative Photography. Then, subsequently, he left that job and became a professor of art there. So anyway, my connection was really with him to begin with, not because of our friendship, but I helped to ideate, as did a number of other people like that--"What would it be?"--because this was the first time that it's ever been done.

I was approached by the next director, who was Jim [James] Enyeart, about his trying to put together enough money to buy some works of mine that were seminal--or that he felt were seminal--that could be part of the collection. So that started and simply continued to grow. They purchased things whenever they could. Then this archive thing came up, which he also proposed to me, saying that I should also take advantage of that. They were interested, I think, in somebody who was contemporary rather than dead and who was experimental in their work as opposed to traditional. All the others were traditional people. In his mind, I fit that bill. So that's how that started. It's just very fortunate for me.

LEHMER: So it's not just something that you've donated.



There's a financial incentive--

HEINECKEN: No, I've never donated any of my artwork to them. Oh, some early work and stuff that I wouldn't put on the market anyway. This is stuff that's more important--

LEHMER: Historically.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, right. But I would say all of the work from the last ten or fifteen years that they hold is on loan for sale. I can pull it out any time I want. And I have done that. When there is an exhibition or something that Pace[Wildenstein] wants, I'll just take it out of there. The archive is different; they own that. There are certain restrictions about what I could get out of there, because that's different. Those are all gifts. There's no money involved in that. I think I mentioned in the beginning, some people got \$100,000, like Ansel Adams and those people. Of course, it's the only place, really, that is a foundation functioning within the university. It gets some university money, but a lot of it is still private money. There are trusts set up. It's independent from the politics and whatever of the university but certainly is still caught up in it to some extent.

LEHMER: Who are some of the other artists whose work is collected by that center?

HEINECKEN: Their own personal artwork?





LEHMER: Yeah.

HEINECKEN: I don't know. It's a pretty wide-ranging thing. I mean, it's probably one of the largest collections of photographs in the country.

LEHMER: Really?

HEINECKEN: Yeah.

LEHMER: I've heard Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, Eugene Smith--

HEINECKEN: Well, these are the people in the archive. The Weston family gave all of his negatives and stuff like that. The same with Eugene Smith, the same with Ansel Adams. These are archival materials as opposed to sets of pictures. Although I think for all these people they also got a lot of the personal work of that individual at the same time. Fred [Frederick] Sommers is another one. These are important people in the history of the medium in America, all of them, and their archives are held there. My opportunity to become part of that was interesting, because I'm not part of that tradition. I'm not that old. So it was a good opportunity for me--not for the collection, but the archive is a terrific thing. I like the idea of it. But they remain mostly interested in a balance of historical and contemporary exhibitions of material.

The show that's there now, which went up when I was



down there, is William Christenberry. It's a huge retrospective exhibition of a contemporary person. It's traveling all over the country. They'll probably buy some work out of that for their collection, but he's not in the archives. How did I get off on that? I don't know exactly. [laughs]

LEHMER: Oh, I think we were talking about Southern California. One of the thoughts was that because you were so important here I'm a little surprised at the fact that your work is leaving town.

HEINECKEN: Well, there's no place here that would take it. It's not because of being local or anything; there just isn't a place in the country like that. [George] Eastman House [International Museum of Photography and Film] is kind of like that, but that's not connected--it is a research institution--to a university like Tucson is. I don't know whether it's ideal or not, but it's an important center for an awful lot of activities that are limited to photography.

Also, I think another thing that's always in the back of my mind about this is that because of your connection to UCLA and to me you probably have--which I think is wonderful--an elevated viewpoint of what I represent or what I've done that isn't shared necessarily by all of the people in this arena--far from it in some cases. But I



think that's okay. I mean, you're doing the interview because you're interested in what I have to say about it, so I'm trying to say it as straightforwardly as I can. It's good that you have an elevated point of view about it, otherwise you wouldn't be doing it. I'd be just another person, right? So that's good. But what I'm trying to say here is it's not-- Well, I don't know how to put that. There are people of my age more important in this than I am or would ever be, like Robert Frank or [Jerry] Uelsmann. There are a lot of people who have made very significant contributions. I hope I'm one of those people. The reason that's interesting in Los Angeles is probably I'm the only one, or the oldest person, or something like that, who's been here long enough to have seen all of this. Darryl [J. Curran] would be another one, or [John] Upton. All those people were around there.

LEHMER: That brings me to an exhibition that I spotted that I thought was very interesting and don't know much about. I went to see this major exhibition of Robert Frank's work, and there was a piece in there on the wall-- We're talking about a very important piece that was part of a major survey of a very important artist. That piece was six images, a matrix of work, that dealt with his participation in a--and you might tell me what that was-- workshop or an event that took place in Boston. You



produced, I think, SX-70s of this. It was with Robert Frank and John Wood and you, which I find--

HEINECKEN: And Dave [David] Heath.

LEHMER: Dave Heath, okay.

HEINECKEN: There were four of us.

LEHMER: That's right. When was this exhibition? Was this the mid-eighties?

HEINECKEN: Well, it never was an exhibition. The date eludes me at this point. It's got to be at least fifteen years ago. \*[I think the first tentative ideas and meetings were in 1982 and ended in 1986.] This was the idea of Bill [William] Johnson and Susan Cohen, who were husband and wife and lived in Boston. She actually was a Ph.D. candidate at Boston University studying with Carl Chiarenza. She never finished it, for whatever reasons I don't know. She was a very bright, intelligent, interesting person. Bill Johnson was a bibliographer at the Eastman House. Well, first of all they got seed money from Polaroid [Corporation] to support this thing. They selected the four of us I don't think with any conscious idea that there was a variety of opinions or anything, although there obviously was. These were people whose

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\* Heinecken added the following bracketed section during his review of the transcript.





artwork they liked.

LEHMER: Terribly diverse, though.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, and different, really. By this time Robert Frank had just begun or had already begun to go back to making photographs again. He made these collages and assemblages, as opposed to *The Americans*, which he had quit during that time period. So that's why the four of us were selected. There certainly could have been other people if they had really thought about the range of personalities or work that they wanted to represent. But it was basically people whose work they respected.

LEHMER: Was there anything within all the diversity of these people that was some thread of unity? That everybody chose at some point to work in book form?

HEINECKEN: Well, yeah. I guess I shouldn't have put it negatively at the beginning. It was a very interesting idea, but it never worked. That's one of those things. It just didn't happen. Partially because the mix of the individuals was such that-- I don't think anybody had an idea that they were self-important--Robert Frank the least of that. But you had four individuals there that are being brought together over a period of time, maybe ten times, to try to make something happen other than getting drunk or whatever you do. We'd just meet and talk. It was very interesting, but it never went anywhere. I think



it would have, except that at some point--which I don't need to go into--Polaroid pulled the money out. So when the money left, there was no way to continue it.

There never was anything produced except that Susan and Bill kept a journal of the whole thing, a marvelous inch-and-a-half-thick record about what went on. They bound five of them, one for themselves and one for each of us. Probably the best selection of all of those people's work is in this bound thing. But it never came to anything.

The idea was that we were to collaborate on something. Well, that sounds interesting, but nobody's going to collaborate with this bunch. It just wouldn't happen that way. Robert Frank is the only person, as far as I know, that ever did anything out of it, simply because his creative mind-- He was probably the least interested in any kind of collaboration that might go on. I don't think any of us were actually friendly to each other at that point. Afterwards we were. It was like trying to put four different animals together or something.

LEHMER: That's a very interesting idea. I'm intrigued by that.

HEINECKEN: The reason Polaroid pulled the money out was that when they got around to actually discussing funding



of this, whether it would be a collaboration or not, the Polaroid officials-- The contact guy was Eelco Wolf. Above him were these other people, who decided that one of these individuals was not correct for this idea and they weren't going to put any more money into it. That's what stopped it.

LEHMER: So it was politicized.

HEINECKEN: Yeah.

LEHMER: Who was it?

HEINECKEN: I'm not saying. But anyway, back to Robert's matrix of pictures, the "lust" thing. I don't even remember how that came up, but that was Robert's catch phrase for this "lust" thing that he saw in me. He was always joking about--

LEHMER: "Curb that lust."

HEINECKEN: "Curb that lust." Yeah, that was the catch phrase between him and me. I think all three of the pictures about the other people have similar things in them. I don't understand what they are, but he knows. Robert Frank knows and John Wood knows somehow. John Wood, if you ask him, "What's that 'curb your lust' thing?" he'll say, "I don't know," because he's not in on it. It's not something that he was aware of. That was between Robert and me. I think he obviously had similar connections to each person that way, and it shows up in



his picture, but you can't interpret it unless you know what's going on.

LEHMER: He has an interesting ability-- God, how would you say this? It's like a hot knife through butter, to make strong connections with people in a short period of time. He came to San Francisco Art Institute for a week, and I felt like he and I had this great bond. All I can think of is that his life must be full of that.

HEINECKEN: Well, he's just a very expressive, volatile person. He's learned how to live off of that "volatility" or whatever that word would be, or off of those horrendous events in his life. They're almost insurmountable, I would think.

LEHMER: Yes.

HEINECKEN: But the thing that was interesting was that you know these individuals a little bit. John Wood is probably the quietest person that I've ever seen. I don't think he spoke ten words over the year and a half period. He's just like this guy. He's an artist, and that's it-- no theory, no big things to say about it. And Dave Heath is catatonic most of the time. He was in stages of manic depression. I mean, he was ill all during this time. He would just disappear or not function. So that really left Robert and me to do whatever we were going to do. We had a good time at it. We became friends more through that





than I had known him before.

Part of the problem of the project was the energy level between the people just never happened. In a sense it's good that it didn't, because it wouldn't have done anything. The way it worked out, pulling the money out was the best thing that ever happened to it, because then there was no commitment to have to do anything at all except make this book, which they made. And it's a great thing. I can't find mine. I don't know where that is.

LEHMER: Do you think it's in Tucson?

HEINECKEN: It must be. I hope so.

LEHMER: I would like to see that.

HEINECKEN: Well, it's very valuable, because there must be two hundred slides of each person. So you see all of *The Americans*, then you have Robert commenting about how he put that together. You have less of that from me or John Wood. The work is there. It's a wonderful collection of slides.

LEHMER: This thing ought to be picked up somehow and produced into a book.

Anyway, contact and exposition.

HEINECKEN: Right. I got this from John Paul Jones, who was the printmaking guy at UCLA who I studied with. I actually got to know him quite well. We were very good friends until he left there. I don't know how it came up--



he wasn't someone who was "teachy" all the time or whatever--but somehow it came up in conversation that the problem of being a university teacher or professor is that you expect it's the contact between you and the students which is important, and it is, but that you don't want to get lost in that. He's advising me--I'm a younger person--that the real job is to teach and inform through exposition. Showing your work is what he means as opposed to telling the student all the time. I'm sure he found himself with the same problems that all people teaching in universities have. You never have any time to do what you're supposed to do other than talking to people. So it was about trying to find a balance between contact, which is important, but not spending all your time doing that and thinking that that's teaching. Because teaching really is when your own work is exposed in addition to the teaching function. Does that make sense?

LEHMER: Yeah.

HEINECKEN: In other words, at UCLA and a lot of places, it's very difficult for-- Well, people like [Elliot] Elgart or Ray [Raymond] Brown, these are interesting artists but never had the ambition or necessity to actually show their work publicly. Ray Brown, for instance, showed his work once a year. He would take the sixth and seventh floor-- It would be a weekend. He wouldn't be there. He just put all



his stuff over there, and you could go over and look at it if you wanted, which was great. But the students never saw it. No gallery ever saw it. It's the hermetic quality that tends to pervade universities. It's kind of difficult.

LEHMER: Well, if we define contact, we're talking about the telling, the lecturing. You're having direct, quote, "contact" with the student. What are the functions of contact? How would you subdefine that term? You're talking about lecturing about your ideas. You pull together interesting thoughts of various methods. You may talk a little bit about what an artist has done--

HEINECKEN: It's not just in the arts that this happens. If you're studying anthropology with someone who's lecturing to you and telling you what this is about who's written five books on this or has a Nobel Prize, you listen to this person. This is what he [Jones] is talking about. You can't actually expect to teach art--or anything, probably--by talking about it unless you in fact are the model. I'm saying Ray Brown is as good a model as anybody, or as good an artist. Maybe he's a better artist than a lot of us, but he's a reclusive artist. He's not someone who cares about activity. Or Elgart or [Samuel] Amato. All those people are excellent teachers. On the other hand, you've got people like Bill [William] Brice, who showed all the time, or Lee Mullican, who was famous, actually, or [Richard]



Diebenkorn. It's been something that I'll just go back to all the time and think about.

This conversation we're having really isn't something that needs to be done. It's good that we're doing it. We have it. You learned a lot from it. It's good for me because I can remember things. But it's not an important situation for my artwork, because every minute I do this I'm not doing something else. That's what Jones was talking about. You have to find this balance. I think it's just good advice, that's all.

LEHMER: Now, when you talk about exposition, it's a matter of your work being out there in the public's eye. The student can look at it independently of contact.

HEINECKEN: Exactly. And maybe, if you're any good at it, then you probably could see in that work some verification of the principles that you're trying to talk about to these people. If it wasn't there, then I don't think the exposition of that would be effective. Well, there's that phrase, "You can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?" That sort of thing.

LEHMER: Have you ever found a problem with this where the student, because they know what kind of work the mentor has done or is interested in, would attempt to imitate that work because it is so available?

HEINECKEN: I don't think that's a problem. The chances of





that happening-- Let's say you never saw the artwork of your teacher, which is the case with some people. You never see what they do. That doesn't seem to affect the possibility that that student internalizes that information, goes ahead to use it, and becomes an artist. You don't have to be exposing all of the time. He's just saying--and I believe it--that it's necessary. Otherwise you lose your--

LEHMER: Credibility.

HEINECKEN: --yeah, your credibility. You lose the sense that art can be something that is important to other people. It can also not be. This is simply a choice that you have to make. You don't have to accept it, you can deny it, but you have to think about it. It's not just exhibitions, although the exhibition is the best thing, because you actually see the stuff. If you have catalogs, or if you're involved in other exhibitions, they actually can see that you're doing something. I think that's important. We don't have football coaches that don't play football when they're younger. They don't enter this on an intellectual level about how to coach football. They know what's going on. That's part of the credibility, I think.



TAPE NUMBER: XI, SIDE TWO

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LEHMER: One of the things that I wanted to elaborate on which I don't know if we've actually talked about yet is a series of satiric slide lectures that you have created. It is in keeping with the irony that is a thread through much of your work. Why did you create these? What were they produced for? What was the response?

HEINECKEN: I don't know the date of the first ones; maybe that's not important. The way--which I guess I've mentioned before--I got involved in SPE [Society for Photographic Education] was that they had this open invitation. Anybody that wanted to come to this meeting-- before it was called SPE--could deliver a paper. I had written a paper about photography for an art history course as a graduate student here. I put slides together that went with this paper which were supposed to explain basically what the effect was in the artistic community when photography was invented. What were some of the thoughts? So I researched maybe twenty or thirty quotations by different people, like [Eugene] Delacroix says, "Painting is dead." Then I would show a slide of Delacroix's paintings so that you could see what he was doing. I think that was the first time that I ever did anything publicly like that. It was a very small group,



maybe ten people or something. I enjoyed it. I really thought, "This is it." I liked doing it, and I still do.

It occurred to me, I think kind of consciously, that there were some people--I can't point to anybody--who were effective at giving a talk and some people who just can't do it. Somehow the idea of irony or satire or making a fool of yourself was an interesting way to get things across, I thought. I think the opportunity that first came was when Linda Connor did an exhibition at the San Francisco Art Institute--small, not really an exhibition but on their bulletin board--of these snapshots that some student who worked in a photo lab lifted. Every time that student saw something weird he would make another slide or print for himself. Then somehow Linda ended up with all of them. There must have been like fifty or sixty of these things. They are hilarious. I mean, they're just strange stuff. So I talked to her about using them. She said fine-- Or she talked to the guy who really owned them, and he said fine. I had a set of slides made of all this stuff and put together a talk, which was a parody on [John] Szarkowski, [Beaumont] Newhall, Peter Bunnell, all the figures in the curatorial range of this. Szarkowski's book at that point was called--what?--where he tells that it's the detail versus the moment--

LEHMER: *Looking at Photographs?*



HEINECKEN: Yes. Anyway, all I did was simply take the writings or presentation of ideas of four or five different historians and make a joke out of it, showing them these snapshots, which of course unconsciously related to-- Well, there's a guy in a jockstrap, for instance, with a hunting rifle. I remember this one. So you'd say something about-- One of the terms Szarkowski uses is "the thing itself." You don't have to say "the thing itself"; "the subject matter" would be the common thing. I would make the joke about the jockstrap is "the thing itself," because people know the phrase from Szarkowski. It's a very funny thing. There's a tape someplace of it, I think. I just loved doing it. I think it's the same part of my personality that ends up in the pictures but sort of in a different way. There are elements of surprise, elements of misconnecting different things that seem to be right, or causing you to think a certain way even though it's crazy. So it's part of what I do daily here but without formalizing it. It's just the way I am.

LEHMER: It reminds me of the SX-70s, the *Lessons in Posing Subjects* series. A lot of photographs that you've taken and reproduced out of catalogs, they're somewhat irrelevant. In a sense this is talking back to the idea that you know the words were more important than what you saw visually.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, exactly. It's really just to put fake





text with a photograph. It's also interesting that you rarely find a photograph that would function like a painting without a title, without text with it. Photographs always for whatever reason need to be captioned. It's like a newspaper photograph of something; you don't know what the fuck it is until you read the caption. You say, "Well, this is some politician doing something." But you always have to be told what it is that you're looking at, because the information isn't there.

LEHMER: Wait. That's the medium of reality versus painting, which is--

HEINECKEN: Well, that's the difference. When photographs are manipulated physically, then-- You look at a [Jerry] Uelsmann picture, and you see that these things don't belong together but they look like they're together. It's clear to you that he's put these two or three things together in a seamless way that makes it look like nature. You don't have to explain it. You can't explain it because it explains itself. But as with most photographs, even Robert Frank is going to put "Detroit, nineteen-seventy-whatever." It tells you that much, at least.

LEHMER: Isn't it interesting that we need to have titles with reality, but things that are obviously not real don't need titles.

HEINECKEN: The other person that comes to mind, [Aaron]



Siskind, was also very big on the idea that you never titled a photograph. Of course, these are highly abstract pictures that you could take as form without having to put some kind of abstract-expressionist title on them. But that happens rarely. Most photographs need to be explained.

That's what was interesting about this slide lecture, because it was satirically explained. It's like using serious ideas on these stupid pictures, which is what Szarkowski does. I mean, I don't disrespect him, but-- Newhall's book was also quoted very much in this first talk, because he's got another whole set of things. John has "the detail," "the moment," "the thing itself." Newhall's got other things he calls-- "Quest for form" is one. I can't even think of the others now, but everybody in the audience is aware of these terms. They know the history of them. That's the bible, actually. But you're looking at the wrong pictures with them.

LEHMER: These authors have created laws.

HEINECKEN: Well, that's their job, you know?

LEHMER: What you're saying reminds me of something that I read that Edward Weston had said. It was, "I don't make rules so I don't have to break them."

HEINECKEN: [laughs] Right.

LEHMER: In a sense you're playing the maverick. Like, "Wait just a minute. I'm not buying into this law that is



being created by this curator." I mean, we all respect what they do, and we need what they do, but it's important that you keep them in check. It's part of your responsibility, I think, as an artist to--

HEINECKEN: If you don't have those terms there's nothing to parody. You have to have them to begin with. They are correct. I don't know of any artists who sit down and try to figure out how to explain this very much, because it's not what they do. But art historians, curators, it's their job to do that.

LEHMER: Unfortunately I think that has changed, in my opinion, to where the curator is the artist. The work is a justification of a preconceived idea.

HEINECKEN: Well, if these things didn't need to be explained we wouldn't even have museums, much less staff for museums, if they were just natural to the culture. But they're not; they're elevated somehow out of that. It's like the cave paintings. You didn't have to explain it to the native people. Somehow they're involved in it. Or any kind of early dance music. It's part of the life of the people. But we're now at a stage where that no longer happens.

LEHMER: How would you respond to the thought that I'm having that goes with the idea that most of the artwork historically, since the beginning of time, maybe from the



cave paintings, is based in religion or spirituality, and then in a contemporary time you might say that it doesn't, or it's not based-- For instance, you look through one of those early modernist histories of art, like [H.W.] Janson's [*History of Art: A Survey of the Major Visual Arts from the Dawn of History to the Present Day*]. It's a two-inch-thick book of predominantly Christian art.

HEINECKEN: Yeah.

LEHMER: They were the patrons for well over a thousand years. So my question is, who is the patron now? Who is the consumer of modern art if it doesn't have religious--? I'm thinking of that cave painting as having a spiritual or religious purpose.

HEINECKEN: Which we no longer understand. We're guessing at a lot of it. We don't know that. But this is easily read as a part of the understanding of an existence of what we call "primitive" peoples. We know that. They weren't going to sit down and intellectually decide they're going to make a picture. This obviously represents some spiritual connection or some understanding.

LEHMER: Some manifestation.

HEINECKEN: Something, yeah. But I think we've lost whatever-- Or like the American Indians or the aborigines in Australia. They're the last people, really, who have any connection like that. They'll lose it eventually, unless





they continue to be isolated, like out in New Guinea or something. I don't know how I got onto this.

I like all the interjectives. It's like something I wrote about once ["A Chronology of Perception: How Photography Changed Seeing," June 1989], actually, in that magazine that you just gave back to me, that big one.

LEHMER: *L.A. Style?*

HEINECKEN: Yeah. It was about the stencil idea of the handprint on the cave wall, which is the first photograph. I like my idea about this, because it's not something drawn. It's actually using a matrix which is your hand, which is an important part of your body. Then it ends up with the Hiroshima bombing, lifting a body and disintegrating it against a wall and leaving that pattern. That's the last photograph. The hand is the first one. Everything in between is simply a mechanization of the stencil. Film negatives are a kind of stencil. There's the contrast of the absolute spirituality of that hand on the cave wall and the tragedy of a body being disintegrated and leaving its mark on the wall in the shape of a body. I'm glad I got to say that, because I like it.

I think Joy [Joyce Neimanas] is the one who explained this to me sometime, and it's not something she's always happy with that I do, but she'll say, "You just can't leave anything alone, can you?" That's her thing with me. And I



say, "That's right, I can't." So no matter what it is-- This is serious. I don't screw around with this. But usually I would be screwing around with it somehow, leaving you thinking you got told something, but you didn't get told anything. Or you got the wrong information but you're happy with it. I do that all the time. These lectures are good that way, because I can-- Some people hate this--[Allan] Sekula or Szarkowski would hate it--that you would take something serious like their ideas and actually misdirect them somehow. So my sense of what I'm interested in is to screw around with things.

LEHMER: The ultimate deconstructionist.

HEINECKEN: Well, I don't know if it's even that. I can be serious when I need to get something done. Like packing these boxes up, I'll do it. But to make a presentation that somehow screws things around and makes people think more about what's being said than you would ever do by listening to something straightforward-- Like the thing I recently did with Darryl that didn't really work out. It still gives people a good idea of what I'm about. I could do a straight introduction of him. He's got all the right credentials. But it's not interesting to do. They'll remember Darryl Curran and me more for what he showed and what I did than they would ever if I didn't do something that at least changes their view of what's going on.



I don't know whether I could make the jump from that to all of my artwork. A lot of it has something screwy in there that's not quite right. People recognize that. It's a trait of mine that's very honest. It's not something I sit down and do for the artwork; it's just something I just do.

It's the same thing with teaching. You know, you can give a person misinformation in such a way that it becomes good information. If you just say, "Look, do this" or "You're not doing this right," they don't listen to you. But if you can screw it around somehow, they remember it.

So anyway, through the last period of time I've done maybe five or six different talks like this based on this premise. Another one is very interesting. Actually its title is "Satiric Lecture" or something like that, and it's about how to make a slide lecture. I have a tape of that you should look at sometime. I can't explain it except that it takes the premise that this is a slide lecture of works all of the people in the SPE community have made. It simply disrupts the whole situation of what those pictures are about, mine included. It's just very funny. And then I dressed up like--

LEHMER: A samurai.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, I dressed up like a Japanese teacher. I haven't really done anything new with that idea much except these introductions and things.



LEHMER: I saw when you did that in Phoenix, Arizona, at that resort hotel.

HEINECKEN: Oh, right. Yeah.

LEHMER: Joy introduced you as a pretty straight person.

HEINECKEN: Actually, I don't know whether you knew it, but Ellen [Birrel] and David [Bunn] were there the first time I did it. I didn't know this at the time, but David was in theater, particularly in staging, so he knew how to put on makeup and how a samurai would look and what paint to use. He did the whole job on me. It was very strange.

One of these things-- I'll always remember this, because sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. There's a picture by Robert Frank of the black woman holding a white, blond, smooth baby. I forget exactly how I introduced it. But the point is, I had this tape recording set up so that when that slide came on and I'm saying something about it, the baby would cry in the audience, but it was this tape. [laughs] It had to be cued in at that moment. When that happens, nobody thinks that there's a tape recorder back there, because why would it be there? There's a baby in the audience crying. When this slide of the baby with the black woman comes on, it's just a knockout thing.

LEHMER: Do you interrupt the lecture and say, "Shut that kid up"?





HEINECKEN: [laughs] No. All you've got to do is just wait until it sinks in that not only did the slide make this baby cry but there actually is a baby there. Then you realize it can't be, it's too silly.

LEHMER: You're in the midst of packing up, dismantling your thirty years of existence in Los Angeles and in Beverly Glen. Why are you doing this? What are you anticipating in Chicago?

HEINECKEN: That's a tough one. Well, as you know, I hate to leave this house in the Glen. It's just ideal. But it's time to do something different, I think.

LEHMER: You mentioned once before about academic artists making bits and pieces, cutting off chunks that were workable.

HEINECKEN: Right.

LEHMER: I sensed that your mouth was watering with the possibility of working on an uninterrupted level, maybe a bigger scale.

HEINECKEN: Well, actually I've already been doing that by taking all those leaves of absence. That's getting around that problem of piecemealing things together and having only a couple of days to try to figure something out. The move to Chicago really isn't going to change how it's been here for the last period of time. But the key is to not teach, obviously. I feel very fortunate, too, that I was able to



get out of that at a time when it was still interesting for me to do it, because teaching can be very time-consuming.

LEHMER: I know that you've spent a whole year not making art while dismantling your life in Los Angeles. You've been organizing things, sorting, sending things off to Tucson, and packing things for Chicago. That's got to be frustrating.

HEINECKEN: Well, it is, but it also has to be done. There's just no way of avoiding it. I think if we didn't decide to go back permanently that this would have been another free year. But this is a very time-consuming thing, because I haven't really paid attention to where things are or anything for over thirty years. I don't mind losing the year. Actually, when I get to Chicago it will be another three months of setting up again. But once that's done, it will be done.

LEHMER: What do you look forward to in Chicago? Besides Polish bars.

HEINECKEN: Well, I don't know. I guess it's a city that has all the characteristics of a city like New York except it's not hectic like New York. I mean, there are crazy people on the streets, but they're not quite as crazy as New York. The pace of life in New York is very hectic. I like the city very much, but Chicago has some of those characteristics of the bustle-- You know, it's a real,



functioning city. All the culture that you need is there, and you don't have to drive to it. In L.A. you're always in the car. For me, I don't even go anywhere because it's so nice here on Viretta Lane. Why would I go to another opening? It's a waste of time. And you do get--like Joy, when you grow up there--used to the weather. The weather is no problem for her. You just live with it. You grow up with it. You have the right coats and everything. But if I had to go to a job every day in Chicago, I wouldn't move there. That's not the place where you want to be out in the wind every morning. But if I don't have to go to a job--which I don't--it's just like living here, except when your dog needs to go out or something.

Also, I think there's a sense--maybe it's just getting older or whatever--that the productive life that I've had is sort of leveling off. It's not just the move that's causing a certain definite leveling off or stopping everything. Maybe it's a time to stop going back and forth like that, because it's extremely disruptive. It's worked because it's allowed me and Joy to not teach all the time. It also takes time just to figure out a lot of things to move. So I want to be at one place, I want everything there. I'd rather it was here, but that's not in the cards because of Joy's job and stuff. I think it will be good.

LEHMER: Do you have anything to add? Any last thoughts?



HEINECKEN: I'll miss some very good friends here, but I also have very good friends everywhere. I'll miss the community of people that are here. But again, I think it's time, like maybe I'm beyond the point where I need to go to everything and be seen and all of that, which was important to me at one point. It just doesn't seem to be important anymore.

And I think that--I've probably touched on this, but I think it's something that is important somehow-- I forgot what I was going to say. I guess you kind of grow up finally. You realize that something like SPE was an interesting thing when it was growing and expanding and arguing about things. It's not interesting to me now. I don't think that I've changed. I mean, I'm older, and I've seen more and all that. It's just not interesting to me anymore, whereas it really was, and doing these lectures and stuff was fun and good to do. But it's not important like that anymore to me. Does that make sense? I don't need the spotlight now for some reason. It's just I don't need it.

Moving to Chicago-- Well, I'm known there, but it's not like here. It's not like having to do all of this stuff. Seeing David and Ellen was great last night, and I'd love to see all those people like that, but you can't do it. All you do is eat dinners. Whereas in Chicago the social life is much different than here somehow for me. It's Joy's





town, Joy's friends, Joy's students, everything. It's good, because I like that. I can just be in the background of that and not have to be "on." So I think it will be good.

When I go downtown to the Biltmore [Hotel], I love it down there. I think it's just great. I couldn't live down there, it's just too nuts. But Chicago is easy that way. It's not hectic. I don't have a sense of danger or anything in any part of the-- Well, unless you go where you're not supposed to go. But it's a good city that way.

LEHMER: Two things. You're also known as a poker player.

HEINECKEN: Well, I enjoy it.

LEHMER: What interests you about that?

HEINECKEN: I've always played. It's certainly not about the money. It's never big money. I don't like poker any more than I like cribbage or bridge, for instance. I used to play bridge. I was just addicted to playing bridge--it was a wonderful thing--in the service for big money. I don't know. I just like that you have to understand certain mechanical things about numbers and odds and possibilities and all of that. Poker is probably the best game there is for that. Bridge you can sort of figure out, or cribbage. I mean, there are certain things you don't do in cribbage or else you'll lose. But in poker there's a lot of bluffing and ploys that are not part of the game exactly. It's a very interesting game.



LEHMER: You've had these marathon poker games at SPE. I remember once in Philadelphia in '82 being asked to go get a slide projector for someone and to help out. "Sure, let me go get it. I'm free. You're busy." I went into this media room where all the equipment was stored--it must have been nine or ten o'clock in the morning--and there were these people who had obviously been up all night long drinking and carousing, but they were still winding down a poker game.

HEINECKEN: Well, that's the other part of it is that that kind of a game--which obviously one wouldn't be involved in now--is like going to sleep. You know, you can only do that so long. It gets really interesting when you're drinking and you've been up for fourteen hours or something doing this and you can't stop it. It's really interesting. You have to stay on your feet when it gets to be that late.

LEHMER: And you're playing with the same people. It's not like you're playing with strangers.

HEINECKEN: Yeah, that's right. You begin to understand how people play and you can sort of read them. It's fun. You never lose or win that much money.

LEHMER: Last week I met an old poker buddy of yours that picked up the bar counter--

HEINECKEN: Oh, Louie [Lunetta].

LEHMER: Louie. He talked about a group of you, mostly artists, who had been playing for forty years here in Los



Angeles.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. Amazing.

LEHMER: You get to know each other pretty well. You just know when they're pulling something, and you know exactly what they're doing.

HEINECKEN: It's a nice group of people because they aren't all artists, but they were all trained as artists, so they understand it, kind of. You don't go to that expecting anything different to happen than what's happened for the forty years. I mean, it never changes. It's just like a nice thing to do. You have a meal-- Nobody gets drunk at those things; it's serious stuff. I guess you could call it a hobby or something like that. It's good to stop everything else and do that with friends.

LEHMER: There's a social thing.

HEINECKEN: What I really like to do--which is another whole thing--is I love to play blackjack for money, because I can make money doing that. I mean, I know how to manage it. I can't make a lot of money, but I can sense when it's time to start gambling with big money as opposed to not. I like that very much.

LEHMER: It's intuition.

HEINECKEN: Well, you learn it. But there you're playing a mechanical sort of game against a casino rather than a group of people.



LEHMER: That's right. On your wall in your office you had a certificate for participating in a blackjack tournament or something.

HEINECKEN: Yeah. That was very interesting. That's the real-- I think up until you get involved in that you're an amateur. You maybe make \$500 or you lose some or whatever. But in this tournament you're finally with professional gamblers as opposed to tourists and drunks. I got to the third round of this thing. I think there were five rounds. Before I got eliminated, I was feeling pretty good. So I got this certificate instead of the money.

LEHMER: There was one last thing that I just learned recently. I've known you now--I don't know how long--and we've worked together personally--

HEINECKEN: Long enough.

LEHMER: Yeah, I think at least ten years. Your name, Heinecken, is spelled with a "C," so I never considered that it would be part of the beer history.

HEINECKEN: Well, I'm not sure that it is. But the story in my family is-- First of all, in looking at my grandfather's books and all--which I haven't actually read completely but would maybe explain this for sure--at some point when he's signing his pictures the "C" just shows up in there. It stays in there for the rest of that time period. But prior to that, when he was a younger person, it's spelled the





other way. It's pronounced the same. The point of the story is that he put the "C" in it prior to going to America because he thought--this is what I heard--that it looked less Germanic. Heineken is not a Dutch name, it's a German name. It has a meaning in German. So the story is, one of his brothers went from northern Germany, where they lived and were raised, to Rotterdam to start this beer thing. They thought it was crazy. They were all becoming Lutheran ministers. Apparently there was this other relative who went and started that business and did not change the spelling of the name. It could also be one of those family myths. I have no idea whether it's true, but I like to tell it because it's interesting. And there's only one family in the United States with that name, it's my family. You never see it in the phone book, and if you see it, it's one of my relatives.

LEHMER: Well, I think we're done. Now that we've cleared that up, I think we can conclude this series of interviews.



# INDEX

- Adams, Ansel, 200, 288-89,  
338, 373, 402, 499  
Amato, Samuel, 109, 187,  
196, 204, 509  
Andreson, Laura F., 208  
Andrews, Oliver W., 206  
Angel Eye Gallery (Los  
Angeles), 346-49, 380  
Art Center College of  
Design, 285  
Art Institute of Chicago,  
312, 336-38; Schools of,  
100  
Avedon, Richard, 427
- Baldessari, John, 356-60,  
365, 367, 370-71  
Barrow, Thomas F. 453-54,  
496-97  
Barth, Uta, 453-54  
Bell, Larry, 376-77  
Bellocq, E.J., 440-42, 450-  
53  
Bengston, Billy Al, 376  
Berger, Paul, 334  
Birrel, Ellen, 98, 267-69,  
522, 526  
Bishop, Michael, 223, 227  
Bloch, E. Maurice, 341-42  
Blumberg, Donald, 306  
Boime, Albert, 226  
Borger, Irene, 166  
Bowman, William, 253-54  
Brice, William J., 187,  
193, 196, 205, 509  
Brooke, Kaucyila, 228  
Brooks, Ellen, 397, 399  
Brown, Dorothy W., 110, 188  
Brown, Raymond B., 188,  
196, 228, 508-9  
Brown, Robert, 398-99  
Bruce, Lenny, 297, 361  
Brumfield, John, 355, 357  
Bullock, Marty, 114  
Bunn, David, 98, 268-69,  
522, 526  
Bunnell, Peter, 306-8,  
394, 396-99, 513  
Burden, Chris, 266
- California Institute of  
the Arts, 354-58  
California State  
University, Fullerton,  
220, 354  
Camerawork Gallery (Costa  
Mesa, Corona del Mar,  
San Francisco,  
California), 349-50,  
385-86  
Caponigro, Paul, 391-92  
Castelli, Leo. See Leo  
Castelli Gallery  
Chappell, Walter, 391  
Cheng, Carl, 195, 203  
Chiarenza, Carl, 96, 185,  
227, 324, 391-93, 502  
Chipperfield, Donald W.,  
125, 127-32, 134-35,  
188, 190-91  
Christenberry, William,  
500  
Clark, Jeff, 66-67, 114-15  
Cohen, Susan, 502, 504  
Coke, F. Van Deren, 312  
College Art Association,  
328, 331  
Collier, John, 369, 428-29  
Conner, Bruce, 295-98  
Connor, Linda, 164, 513  
Cornell, Joseph, 404  
Cowin, Eileen, 169-70, 174  
Cross, James A., 126, 128,  
136  
Cumming, Robert, 227, 366-  
67, 386, 441-42  
Cunningham, Imogen, 338  
Curran, Darryl J., 167-69,  
345-46, 350-52, 354,  
397, 501, 520



Curran, Doris, 167-68, 174

Danto, Arthur, 361

Dater, Judith, 157

Davis, Jack, 14, 33

Delano, Annita, 110

Diebenkorn, Richard, 187,  
192, 204-5, 255, 510-11

Divola, John, 216, 227

Doherty, William, 205-6,  
290-91, 348

Duchamp, Marcel, 262, 315-  
16, 417-19, 422-23

Durant, Mark Alice, 99,  
221, 225, 228

Elgart, Elliot J., 187,  
195, 483-84, 508-9

Enos, Chris, 228

Enyeart, James, 497

Erhard Seminar Training  
(est), 147-48

Fahey, David, 353

Fahey/Klein Gallery (Los  
Angeles), 384

Fichter, Robert, 99, 222,  
227, 228, 496-97

Finley, Karen, 320

Fiskin, Judith Anne, 228

Flick, Robert, 229

Frank, Robert, 35, 340,  
369, 390, 424, 501-7,  
515, 522

Friedlander, Lee, 99, 222,  
227, 373, 424, 440

Gagosian Gallery (Beverly  
Hills), 380-81

Gatewood, Charles, 426

Gauss, Kathleen, 340, 353

Gedeon, Lucinda H., 239

George Eastman House  
International Museum of  
Photography and Film,  
306, 324, 392, 500, 502;  
*Persistence of Vision*,  
305-6, 392-93; *Toward a  
Social Landscape*, 305,

392; *Vision and  
Expression*, 395

Gill, Charles, 306

Golden, Judith, 227

Goldin, Nan, 426-27

G. Ray Hawkins Gallery  
(Los Angeles), 353, 385

Group F/64, 338, 371, 373

Grunwald, Fred, 341

Guillfoyle, Patrick, 41-  
43, 45-48, 52

Hawkins, G. Ray. See G.  
Ray Hawkins Gallery

Heath, David, 502-4, 506

Heinecken, Friedli  
(grandfather), 5-9, 12,  
14, 21, 168

Heinecken, Friedli Wilhelm  
(father), 1-3, 5-6, 8-  
16, 19, 22-25, 33, 35,  
65, 90, 92-93, 109

Heinecken, Geoffrey R.  
(son), 104-5, 119-20,  
122, 138-40, 143-45,  
146-47, 149-50, 151-54,  
177-80

Heinecken, Martin (uncle),  
8-10, 92

Heinecken, Mathilda Moehl  
(mother), 2-5, 11, 13-  
14, 16, 19-22, 25, 33,  
35, 65, 93-94, 103-4,  
109

Heinecken, Robert--group  
exhibitions: 390, 439-  
42. See also entries  
under George Eastman  
House and Museum of  
Modern Art

Heinecken, Robert--works  
by: *Are You Rea*, 403-  
17, 422-23, 457-58;  
*Cliche Vary*, 170, 448;  
*Different Strokes*, 299;  
*Documentary Photogram*,  
429; *He:/She:*, 445-46;  
*Iconographic Art  
Lunches*, 433; *Just Good*



- East for U Diner*, 409-10;  
*Lessons in Posing Subjects*, 514-15;  
*Recto/Verso*, 410, 416-17, 430; *Satiric Lecture* (slide lecture), 521-23;  
*TV Dinner*, 421; *Venice Alley*, 401-2  
 Heinecken, Theodore (cousin), 16  
 Helms, Jesse, 318  
 Hornbeak, Susan, 264-65  
 Howe, Graham, 371  
 Hugunin, James, 98, 239-41, 259, 269-70, 445-57  
 Hull, Kathe Heinecken (daughter), 104-5, 119-20, 122-23, 138-40, 143-47, 149-53, 177-80  
 Hultén, K.G. Pontus, 492-94  
 Humphrey, John, 312  
  
 Irwin, Robert, 376, 487, 489  
  
 Jan Kesner Gallery (Los Angeles), 384-85  
 Jennings, Thomas, 127, 136  
 Johnson, William, 502, 504  
 Jones, Harold, 496-97  
 Jones, John Paul, 110, 125, 127-30, 135, 188, 197, 507-10  
 Josephson, Kenneth, 227  
  
 Kane, Art, 285  
 Katz, Heidi, 290  
 Kelley, Ron, 275-76  
 Kesner, Jan. See Jan Kesner Gallery  
 Knight, Kenneth, 111-13  
 Krims, Les, 440-42  
 Kruger, Barbara, 272  
  
 Lamkin, John P., 349-50  
 Land, Edwin H., 437-38  
 Landweber, Victor, 247-48, 250, 259  
 Larson, William, 227  
  
 Lartigue, Jacques-Henri, 340  
*L.A. Style* (magazine), 519  
 Laub, Claudia, 347-49  
 Laub, Randolph, 347-49  
 Leary, Timothy, 471  
 Legrady, George, 228  
 Leo Castelli Gallery (New York City), 382  
 Lifson, Ben, 354-55, 357  
 Light Gallery (New York City), 496  
 Loescher, Robert, 166-67  
 Longman, Lester D., 129-31  
 Lord, Catherine, 99, 355-56  
 Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, 322, 345-47, 353, 380  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 338-40, 344, 352-53, 372, 381, 487, 489-93  
 Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art. See Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
 Lunetta, Louie, 528-29  
 Lyon, Danny, 373  
 Lyons, Nathan, 228, 304-6, 308, 316, 323-24, 326-27, 391-92, 395, 496-97  
  
 Mabrey, Dick, 78-83, 86-88  
 Mann, Sally, 318-19  
 Mapplethorpe, Robert, 318, 424-26  
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 390-91  
*Master Plan for Higher Education in the State of California, 1960-75*, 210-13, 220  
 McCarthy, Paul, 215, 221  
 McFadden, Mark, 221-22, 225, 227-28  
 McGowan, Kenneth, 191-92, 195, 203-4  
 McMillan, Jerry, 227,





- 351, 397-98  
 Mekas, Jonas, 298  
 Metzger, Ray, 306  
 Miller, Henry, 156-58, 164-65, 471  
 Mock, Stan, 173-74  
 Moehl, Else (aunt), 4, 17, 33  
 Moehl, Emma (grandmother), 4  
 Moehl, Henry (grandfather), 4  
 Moehl, Robert (uncle), 4  
 Mora, John (son-in-law), 149  
 Mora, Karol Heinecken (daughter), 105, 141-42, 146-51, 153, 177-80  
 Morgan, Barbara, 340  
 Morrison, Deke, 185  
 Mortensen, William, 371, 373  
 Mullican, Lee, 509  
 Museum Folkwang (Essen, Germany), 396  
 Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), 364-65, 372, 381, 484-92  
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston--School of, 431-33  
 Museum of Modern Art (New York City), 306-7, 312, 336-38, 340, 359, 386-88, 393-94, 487  
 Museum of Modern Art--exhibitions at: *Family of Man*, 336-37, 388; *Mirrors and Windows*, 386, 388-89; *Photography as Printmaking*, 307, 394; *Photography for Collectors*, 307, 393-94; *Photography into Sculpture*, 307, 396-99  
 Neimanas, John, 183  
 Neimanas, Joyce (second wife), 34, 100, 159-62, 166-76, 180-85, 228, 409, 446, 483, 519, 525-27  
 Nettles, Bea, 227  
 Newhall, Beaumont, 515-16  
 Nordland, Gerald, 344  
 Nunes, Gordon M., 109, 187, 194-96, 204  
 Ohio Silver Gallery (Los Angeles), 347-49, 380  
 O'Neil, Patrick, 195, 203  
 Opie, Catherine, 426, 429  
 Oracle (professional organization), 334  
 Orange Coast College, 349  
 Ortiz, Susan H. See Hornbeak, Susan  
 Outerbridge, Paul, 371  
 PaceWildenstein (gallery, New York City, Los Angeles), 321-22, 380-81, 498  
 Parker, Bart, 170, 174, 227  
 Pasadena Art Museum, 399-400  
 Pearlman, Barbara, 346  
 Penn, Irving, 427  
 Photographic Administrators, 334  
 Polaroid Corporation, 422, 429-38, 502-5, 507  
 Pratt Institute School of Art and Design, 285  
 Price, Richard, 272  
 Rauschenberg, Robert, 401  
 Reck, David (cousin), 16  
 Reck, Marie Heinecken (aunt), 9  
 Reck, Tom (cousin), 16  
 Reuter, John, 432  
 Revell, Barbara Jo, 227  
 Rice, Leland, 227, 487  
 Richards, I.A., 482  
 Riverside City College, 29-31, 60-62, 94-95  
 Rochester Institute of Technology, 285, 332



- Roland, D.R., 40, 49-50, 53, 55-56  
 Rosenfield, John, 125, 127-29, 135  
 Ruscha, Edward, 377  
  
 Sahl, Mort, 297  
 Samaras, Constance J., 228  
 San Francisco Art Institute, 200, 338, 513  
 San Francisco Museum of Art. See San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 311-12, 336-38  
 San Francisco State University, 200, 218, 352  
 Schwitters, Kurt, 404-5  
 Sekula, Allan, 99, 272-73, 456-57, 520  
 Sherman, Cindy, 424  
 Siegel, Arthur, 407-8  
 Siskind, Aaron, 340, 515-16  
 Smith, Eugene, 499  
 Smith, Henry Holmes, 227, 323-24, 326  
 Sobieszek, Robert, 353, 496-97  
 Society for Photographic Education (SPE), 132-33, 155-56, 160, 282-86, 322-35, 380, 395, 409, 440, 476, 512, 526  
 Sommers, Frederick, 499  
 Spaulding, Jonathan, 288-89  
 Standard Oil Company of California, 171  
 Steichen, Edward, 337  
 Steinert, Otto, 396  
 Stephen White Gallery (Los Angeles), 353  
 Stieglitz, Alfred, 262  
 Storey, Doris, 182  
 Storey, Janet (first wife), 31-32, 102-7, 119-23, 138-42, 144, 146-56, 158, 160-64, 177-82, 184, 421, 444  
 Sturges, Jock, 318-19  
 Stussy, Jan, 109-10, 187, 196, 198-99  
 Sweetman, Alex, 410  
 Szarkowski, John, 306-8, 316, 337, 386-89, 391-92, 513-14, 516, 520  
  
 Teske, Edmund, 223, 372, 408  
 Thiebaud, Twinka, 156-59, 164, 178  
 Thiebaud, Wayne, 157  
 Todd, Mike, 171  
 Truax, Karen, 227  
 Tucker, Anne, 227  
  
 Uelsmann, Jerry, 306, 501, 515  
 University High School (Los Angeles), 147-48  
 University of Arizona--Center for Creative Photography, 497-500  
 University of California, Berkeley, 134, 210, 212, 217-20, 241  
 University of California, Davis, 157, 218  
 University of California, Irvine, 212, 216, 354  
 University of California, Los Angeles: College of Applied Arts, 129, 207-8; College of Fine Arts, 127, 129, 131, 134-35, 207-8, 209-10, 246, 496 (See also Department of Art); Department of Art, 107-10, 125-26, 128, 131, 134, 186-90, 193-97, 199-204, 206-10, 214-15, 246, 253-54, 275-80, 287-88, 356; Department of Design, 209; Department of Film and Television, 203-4, 210, 290-92, 294;



Department of Theater,  
 210; Grunwald Center for  
 the Graphic Arts, 239,  
 340-44, 375; UCLA at the  
 Armand Hammer Museum of  
 Art and Cultural Center,  
 342; University  
 Extension, 123-24, 128,  
 132, 189-90, 201, 341,  
 344-45, 348, 351-54;  
 Wight Art Gallery, 126-  
 28, 190, 197, 340-41,  
 344, 394, 399  
 University of California,  
 Riverside, 210, 212, 216;  
 California Museum of  
 Photography, 216, 354  
 University of California,  
 Santa Cruz, 210, 212, 220  
 University of Southern  
 California, 292-93, 338  
 Upton, John, 349-50, 352,  
 386, 441, 501  
  
 Valentine, Duane, 487, 489  
 Visual Studies Workshop  
 (Rochester, New York),  
 306  
 Voulkos, Peter, 197, 208  
  
 Walker, Todd, 227, 351  
 Warhol, Andy, 401, 434  
 Wegman, William, 364-65,  
 370-71  
 Weitzel, Lee, 66-67, 114-15  
 Welpott, Jack W., 157, 200,  
 352  
 Weston, Edward, 198, 246,  
 261-62, 340-41, 425, 499  
 White, Minor, 200, 338,  
 386, 389-92, 441-42  
 White, Stephen. See  
 Stephen White Gallery  
 Wight, Frederick S., 126,  
 197  
 Winogrand, Garry, 99, 206,  
 222, 227, 229, 332, 373,  
 424  
 Wolf, Eelco, 505  
  
 Wood, John, 306, 502-7  
  
 Yavno, Max, 371  
 Young, Colin, 291-92, 294











